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Beyond princess and squaw : Wilma Mankiller and the Cherokee gynocentric system

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BEYOND PRINCESS AND SQUAW: WILMA MANKILLER AND THE CHEROKEE GYNOCENTRIC SYSTEM

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By

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND PRINCESS AND SQUAW: WILMA MANKILLER AND THE CHEROKEE GYNOCENTRIC SYSTEM

by Maureen O'Dea Caragliano

This thesis takes the reader beyond the historically accepted descriptors of princess and squaw for Native American women. In popular and scholarly literature, Native American women have been overlooked as leaders in their own communities and as political activists.

Using the Cherokees as an example, my research shows that before colonization Cherokee women held positions of power and authority. They had political, social, and economic status in their society. After colonization, Cherokee women ceased to have a voice in government. The patriarchal nuclear family replaced the matrilineal clan system, and the home, not the field, became the domain of women

The election of Wilma Mankiller as the first female principal chief of the Cherokees restored women to their rightful place in Cherokee society. Her political campaign strategy and her successful leadership of the second largest Native American tribe in the United States serve as a model for all women.

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PREFACE

The topic for my thesis, Wilma Mankiller and Cherokee gynocentrism, may seem inappropriate since I have no claim to Native American ancestry. If I have offended the Native American community by being another non-Indian, defining, depicting, and describing Native Americans, I am deeply sorry.[1] However, being immersed in Cherokee history for almost three years has created in me a substantial pro-Cherokee bias. For this I make no apologies, for it would be a rare individual who would not come to respect and admire the Cherokees after studying their values and experiences. When I met Wilma Mankiller and was able to speak with her at the National Women's Studies Conference in 1994, my interest in learning more about the Cherokees was heightened and I began my research in earnest.

I was introduced to Native American history at San Jose City College when I researched a short paper on the West and Native American women. At San Jose State, Dr. Rivka Polatnick suggested that I write a paper on Native American women as leaders in their communities and during my research I came across Wilma Mankiller. I read her autobiography and was surprised to learn

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[1]I make this statement in response to Carol Lee Sanchez's article, "Sex, Class and Race Intersections Visions of Women of Color," Sinister Wisdom, A Gathering of Spirit: North American Indian Women 22/23, special issue (1983): 150-54.

that the Cherokees had once been a gynocentric society. Prior to my research, my knowledge of Native Americans came from history texts, movies, and television, very unreliable sources.

I learned that Columbus "discovered" America; however, no one mentioned that since Columbus came from a European background he may have been culturally traumatized when he discovered America. He was also geographically dislocated. He thought that he had reached the West Indies and because he saw people with the same skin pigmentation and who looked alike (at least to him), he called them Indians. Forget the fact that the inhabitants of the North American continent had diverse cultures, different customs and dress, and spoke hundreds of different languages, Columbus created a new ethnic group, Indians.

From movies and television I learned about the two diametrically opposed groups, cowboys and Indians. The cowboys were always the good guys, often outnumbered by the wild and savage Indians yet fighting until the bitter and bloody end, ultimately prevailing over the Indians. The Indians lurked in the wilderness, went on the warpath dressed in feathers and with painted faces, and swooped down on wagon trains, killing and scalping men, women, and children. Their speech consisted of "how" and "ugh," reducing them to grunting, mentally retarded, monosyllabic idiots. Of course, there were the good Indians such as Tonto, the Lone Ranger's faithful companion. Tonto, which means fool in

Spanish, advanced from "ugh" to such eloquent utterances as "kemo sabe" and "get-em up Scout."

Television also provided me with a distorted image of Native American women. The Howdy Doody Show featured Princess Summer Fall Winter Spring dressed in buckskin, wearing her black hair in braids and sporting a feather in her head band. Following in her image was Little Feather who walked on stage at the 1972 Academy Awards to accept Marlon Brando's Oscar. Their counterpart, the squaw, turned up in most cowboy and Indian movies and television shows. The squaw was usually part of the scenery, sitting beside the tipi nursing her baby or, along with the horses, stampeding from the camp during an attack by the U.S. Cavalry.

This pathetic visual image of native women was compounded by how the white man defined the word squaw. I was not aware of its obscene meaning until I began my research, demonstrating how the term has become part of American vernacular. It also explains how, as recently as March 22, 1997, members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) asked that the Squaw Valley ski resort in California erase the word squaw from its name. Concord based members of AIM plan to approach U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer to ask for their support in educating Americans about the derogatory implications of the term and why it needs to be replaced.[2] If AIM is willing to

[2]Tracy Seipel, "Movement Begins to Erase 'squaw'," San Jose Mercury News, 22 March 1997, 1A, 9A.

engage non-Indian spokeswomen for their cause, is it inappropriate for me to write about the history.of Cherokee women and the leadership of Wilma Mankiller?

I did not wait for a Native American to seek me out to educate me about native people. I chose to research a subject that has been neglected by feminist scholars. I realize that there are weaknesses inherent in my research due to a lack of primary sources. I had hoped to interview Wilma Mankiller but, at the time of our meeting Chief Mankiller was involved in the election of a new principal chief. Her autobiography, however, served as an invaluable source of information. Although I tried to be objective in my account, I could not help reacting to the injustices inflicted upon the Cherokees by the United States government in the name of God and progress. Regardless of how acculturated the Cherokees became they could never seem to satisfy the white man. Sexism motivated the white man to force the Cherokees to terminate the political power of women, and greed, disguised as the civilizing of the Cherokees, drove the white man to rob the Cherokees of their land and natural resources. However, underlying both sexism and greed was the undercurrent of racism.

Whites have long regarded themselves as the superior race and have conducted scientific studies to support their theory. As a result, all other races are viewed from a white standpoint and are marginalized or seen as "other."

They are not just different from the people in the dominant group but are seen as less human or uncivilized. The Indian historian, Robert F.Berkhofer, Jr., noted that in both fact and fiction Native Americans are defined as a separate and single other.[3] By perpetuating the inferiority of Native Americans, the white man justified his actions. Because many tribes held their land in common and only cultivated land that was necessary for survival, the white man portrayed them as lazy and justified the taking of their unused land in the name of progress. The white man accused Native Americans of being ignorant because they did not make full use of all their natural resources. Today, our natural resources are nearly exhausted because we did not understand what the native people were trying to tell us about conservation.

There is so much to be learned from Native Americans if we would only get beyond our deep-seated prejudices and explore their culture, appreciating the differences between our two worlds. It is time for historians to write an accurate account of the native people who inhabited the North American continent and who are our forefathers and foremothers. It is time for American feminists to recognize that feminism was not brought to America but already existed in many native cultures.[4]

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[3]Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc., 1978), xv.

[4]Sally Roesch Wagner, The Root of Oppression is the Loss of Memory: The Iroquois and the Earliest Feminist Vision," in Iroquois Women, ed. Wm. Guy Spittal (Ontario, Canada: Iroqrafts, Ltd., 1990), 223.

Paula Gunn Allen notes that American feminists have forgotten that the kind of society that empowered women existed and that women formed the basis of its rules and civilization.[5] Why have feminist scholars avoided writing about the presence of gynarchial societies? Will Wilma Mankiller's successful leadership of the Cherokee Nation serve as a model for American women entering politics or will she be regarded as irrelevant compared to other successful white American women? In spite of the historic racism toward Native Americans, I predict, as seen by her many public awards from white institutions and organizations, that Wilma Mankiller will ultimately be recognized, valued, and held up as a model for leadership for all American women.

My thesis presents a limited account of the role that Cherokee women played in their society and serves as a starting point for those interested in the roots of feminism in America. Wilma Mankiller provides an outstanding example of women's capacity for effective leadership. She balanced traditional Cherokee values with modern American society's expectations for successful leadership.

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[5]Paula Gunn Allen, The Sacred Hoop (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 213.

INTRODUCTION

A nation is not conquered
Until the hearts of its women
Are on the ground
Then it is done, no matter
How brave its warriors
Nor how strong its weapons.
Cheyenne Proverb

Despite five hundred years of systematic genocide, Native Americans have endured in large part because of the roles that Native American women have played in their societies. In the Iroquois Great Law of Peace, women were the progenitors of the nation. The chain of women linked the past with the future in Indian culture. According to Paula Gunn Allen, "In the beginning was thought, and her name was Woman. . . . To her we owe our lives, and from her comes our ability to endure, regardless of the concerted assaults on our, on Her being."[1]

Before colonization, many Native American societies were matriarchal, matrilineal, and matrifocal, which meant that women had a great deal of control. Women had influence, prestige, and authority and wielded economic, social, and political power. Yet we know very little about their lives and contributions to the endurance of Native cultures. Few know that Cherokee women had a political

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[1]Paula Gunn Allen, The Sacred Hoop (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 11.

voice long before Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton campaigned for women's suffrage.

Historically, the literature has focused on Indian wars and the lives of Geronimo, Crazy Horse, Cochise, and Sitting Bull. When women are included in the literature, they are defined, depicted and discussed in Euro-American terms from a patriarchal perspective. The resulting images of princess and squaw are biased, demeaning, and stereotypical representations of Native American women. They are insulting to Native women and render a false impression of the role, especially in politics, that women played in the survival of Native American societies. These controlling images of princess and squaw stereotyped Native American women. Scholarship on the power, influence and authority that Native women had prior to colonization is conspicuously lacking.

In this thesis, I am not primarily concerned with the stereotypical images of princess and squaw. In her works, Rayna Green effectively disscusses these images in depth. My objective is to move the reader beyond those images through a study of the economic, social, and political roles of Cherokee women before colonization. I will describe the historical events that caused the demise of women's power, influence, and authority. And I will explain how Wilma Mankiller, as deputy chief and the first woman elected principal chief of the Cherokees, met the challenge to restore her people to the state of self-

determination that is necessary for the continued survival of the Cherokee Nation.

A study of Wilma Mankiller's terms in office can also serve as a model for feminist change within the dominant culture. American culture, dominated by a male hierarchy, has too long circumvented women's election to public office. There are valuable lessons to be learned from Wilma Mankiller, the woman and former Principal Chief of the Cherokees.

Currently, there are only nine women United States senators (ninety-one men) and fifty-two women (three hundred eighty-three men) in the House of Representatives. Until the appointment of Sandra Day O'Connor in 1981, no woman had served on the U.S. Supreme Court. The closest any other American woman has come to the level of Wilma Mankiller is Geraldine Ferraro, who was nominated for vice president in 1984.[2] In the United States there is no experience with women in the highest leadership positions, as Antonia Frazier pointed out in The Warrior Queens. In the past warrior queens existed in many cultures in fact or in fiction, but not in the United States. Frazier noted that the American public reacted uneasily to the vice presidental nomination of Geraldine Ferraro, a potential warrior queen.[3]

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[2]In 1872 Victoria Woodhull ran for president and Shirley Chrisholm ran in 1972. See Carol Hymowitz and Michaele Weissman, A History of Women in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), 164-74 and Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn ed., Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia (Bloomington and Indianapolis: First Indiana University Press, 1994), 236-38.

American society socializes women and men for specific gender roles, and any interchanging of these roles illicits strong opposition. Males can dream of becoming the president of the United States, whereas the role of wife and mother is the socially prescribed dream for females. All children, especially little girls, need same sex political role models to learn from, so that they too can dream about becoming president.

Politics is dominated by men, while women are encouraged to do volunteer clerical work during campaigns. Although there is no overt conspiracy preventing women from seeking political office, Jeane Kilpatrick observed that, "society has never barred women from breadwinning roles, but only from economic roles that are profitable and respectable. . . . Men do not bar women from taking part in politics, but only hamper their efforts to participate in power."[4]

When women enter the political arena they are judged by a different standard than men. The public views political behavior as masculine, requiring autonomy, independent opinions, and aggressive actions, contrary to the way we expect women to act.[5] If women candidates exhibit any of these traits, the public sees them as aggressive and labels them "bitchy" or "shrill." The press describes women differently than men. In 1984, the press called Geraldine

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[3]Antonia Frazier, The Warrior Queens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 7.

[4]Jeane Kilpatrick, Political Women (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 6.

[5]Dorothy W. Cantor and Toni Bernay, Women in Power (Boston, New York and London: Houghton Miffin Company, 1992), 7.

Ferraro "feisty," creating an image of a small, nonthreatening individual while they pronounced George Bush "forceful," a much more powerful image. Recall also the media attention to Pat Schroeder's tears when she declined to run for president. Displaying emotion is regarded as a weakness in female candidates.[6]

Sexism continues to flourish in American culture. The double standard is alive and well in the realm of politics. While female candidates have to prove their competency, strength, and experience, the public's focus is often on their personal appearance and body language. The public expects them to conceal their emotions and deny their femininity while not appearing mannish. Women need to establish their credibility over and over again, whereas, a white male fits the public's most acceptable image.[7] However, one woman, Wilma Mankiller, was able to overcome these obstacles to become the first woman to lead a large U.S. Indian tribe.

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[6]Deborah Tannen, You Just Don't Understand (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), 241-42; Cantor and Bernay, 85.

[7]Cantor and Bernay, 74-77, 167.

CHAPTER II

PRINCESS AND SQUAW

For decades the media, literature, and educational materials promulgated the images of princess and squaw. They defined not only how the dominant culture viewed Native American women, but also how they saw themselves. The real voices of Native women remained silent. As Paula Gunn Allen so aptly states the situation, "Image casting and image control constitute the central process that American Indian women must come to terms with, for in that control rests our sense of self, our claim to the past and to a future that we define and that we build."[1]

The image of the Indian Princess depicts a beautiful maiden, dressed in beaded buckskin. She wears an abundance of silver and turquoise jewelry, and sports a single feather in a head band covering long, shiny, black braids. During the 19th century her likeness appeared on patent medicine bottles and tobacco labels. She was the cigar-store princess, and the figurehead on warships and clippers.[2]

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[1]Allen, Sacred Hoop, 192.

[2]For a discussion of the many models, stereotypes and images in Euro-American vernacular culture see Leslie Fiedler, "The Only Good Indian: The Image of the Indian in Vernacular American Culture" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1973).

This image of the Native American women achieved fame through the Pocahontas legend. Pocahontas, who is purported to have saved Captain John Smith's life, really existed. However, the actual facts of her relationship with the Jamestown settlers and with Captain John Smith were changed to fit Western European standards. In order to satisfy the Western European model for women, Pocahontas had to discard her heritage and align herself with the dominant culture. Europeans then elevated her to the level of princess.[3]

Although not characterized as a princess, Sacajawea is recognized in popular and scholarly literature as aligning herself with the white men of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Sacajawea was the squaw of the Frenchman, Carboneau. The squaw is the princess's counterpart. The term squaw is part of a much longer Algonquin term meaning woman.[4] Eventually, it came to mean drudge or prostitute.[5] A silent, docile, hunched-back, weather-beaten female with a baby strapped to her back illustrated the squaw. White society shamed her for her relationship with white hunters and trappers because she shared her bed for money or lust. Popular songs and ballads of the 19th century described her as a fat, ugly, squat, dark, alcoholic whore.[6]

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[3]Margaret E. Galloway, "American Indian Women in Literature: Stereotypical Characterizations of Insufficient Self-Determination," paper presented at the Tenth Annual American Indian Conference at Mankato State University, Mankato, Minnesota, May 7, 1987, 4-5.

[4]Marion Gridley, American Indian Women (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1974), 13.

[5]Shirley Hill Witt, "Native Women Today," Civil Rights Digest 6, no. 3 (1974): 29.

The dominant culture's songs, poems, prose, television, and the cinema perpetuated these images of ignoble squaw and virginal princess. In the popular media of televison and movies, one usually see Indian women scurrying helplessly about while their camp is under attack by the U.S. cavalry. Today, Native American women appear only in adjunct roles to men. In the movie Dances With Wolves, Pretty Shield, the Chief's wife, sits quietly by his side while they are gathered around their home fire. She makes but one comment in an aside. Although women are virtually silent in Dances With Wolves, Disney's 1995 release of Pocahontas features a Native American woman as the main character. However, she is reduced to an animated character that reinstates the princess image for the next generation. Like the squaw Sacajawea, Pocahontas is portrayed more as a legend than as a human being.

History books would have us believe that these women made no real contributions to their tribal societies or to American civilization, except through their relationship with white men. Surely between these two extremes there were women of substance, strength, courage, and honor. Native American women were neither stolid drudges nor virtuous nobility, but vital human beings essential to the survival of their communities. Unfortunately, when historians include Native American women the result is often discriminatory.

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[6]Rayna Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," Massachusetts Review 16 (Autumn 1975): 711.

Beatrice Medicine criticized male anthropologists for their neglect of the female component in Native American society. When they did include Native women, they referred to them as "drudges, beasts of burden, and other demoralizing terms."[7] Many of the ethnographic studies written in the first half of the twentieth century included women only in relation to food and child care. However, Eleanor Leacock noted that "Women are commonly stated or implied to hold low status in one or another society without benefit of empirical documentation."[8] However, Robert Lowie's 1935 ethnography, The Crow Indians, focused on the roles of women in religion, entertainment, community work, and property ownership. He noted that women had a fair place in tribal life. More substantive autobiographical and biographical literature of Native American women also grew during this period--Frank Linderman's Pretty Shield: A Crow Medicine Woman (Red Woman) (1931) and Ruth Underhill's "The Autobiography of A Pagapo Woman (Maria Chona)" (1936). This type of literature continued into the late twentieth century with Margaret Blackman's During My Time: Edenshaw Davidson, A Haida Woman (1982) and Wilma Mankiller: A Chief and Her People (Mankiller and Wallis, 1993).

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[7]Beatrice Medicine, The Native American Woman: A Perspective New Mexico University, Las Cruces, New Mexico, March 1978, ERIC/CRESS.

[8]Eleanor Burke Leacock and Richard Lee, eds., Myths of Male Dominance (New York: Monthly Review Press 1981), 134.

In 1954, Carolyn Thomas, who has written several books about Native Americans, attempted to produce a more dignified picture of Native American women in Indian Women Chief. It had the potential for enlightening readers to the historical achievements of Native women, but was so poorly written that one wonders if it did more harm than good. Actually applying the term chief to some of these women is debatable. To offset Thomas's feeble work, Gretchen Bataille in 1993 collected more than 240 short biographical sketches in Native American Women. These included distinguished female artists, healers, politicians, activists, and anthropologists.

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that significant changes in the literature on Native American appeared. The sixties saw more literature produced from a female perspective. Nancy Lurie's 1961 compelling autobiography of Mountain-Wolf Woman provided a dramatic contrast between male and female Native American visions of the world. Other excellent examples include Florence Shipk's The Autobiography of Delphina Cuero (1968) and Louise Undall's Me and Mine: The Life Story of Helen Sekaquaptewa (1969).

The spirit of the women's movement continued to inspire women-centered works in the 1970s along with the Native American Movement (AIM) which drew the public's attention to the plight of Native Americans. Beatrice Medicine's "The Role of Women in Native American Societies: A Bibliography" in the Indian

Historian (1975) emphasized the need for less invasive work on Native American women. Following Medicine was Rayna Green's annotated bibliography, Native American Women (1983) containing 672 items. Eight years later (1991) Bataille and Sands produced a four hundred page annotated guide to research. The end of the 1980s welcomed Sandra Morgen's Gender and Anthropology (1989) which contained an article by Patricia Albers, "From Illusion to Illumination: Anthropological Studies of American Indian Women."

Finally, in 1995, Laura F. Klein and Lillian Ackerman's Women and Power in Native North America took up the mantle to define the roles of Native women in their respective societies. Klein and Ackerman asked several scholars to share their data about the place that Native North American women held in eleven Native nations. The authors challenged the stereotypes of gender relations conferred on them by Europeans and Euro-Americans in an attempt to enlighten readers about the real power and influence that Native women had in their societies.

Before colonization "women were at the seat of power, women and men had mutual responsibilities, mutual dependencies, mutual roles, in carrying out the business of survival."[9] The social structure of Indian societies traditionally ranged from egalitarian social systems to women-centered gynocracies, a belief

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[9]Rayna Green, "American Indian Women," in Bridges of Power, ed. Lisa Albrecht and Rose M. Brewer (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), 63.

held by Paul Gunn Allen. Allen states that "Traditional tribal lifestyles are more often gynocratic than not, and they are never patriarchal. . . . The physical and cultural genocide of American Indian tribes is and was mostly about patriarchal fear of gynocracy."[10] Thus, a potential goal of colonization would be the devaluation of women and the subsequent destruction of their power. In the case of the Cherokees, this meant that women's political power, their voice in government, had to be silenced.

Unfortunately, their voice was silenced and remained so until the election of Wilma Mankiller as the first female principal chief of the Cherokees. Before embarking on a discussion of Wilma Mankiller, it is necessary to explain the significant role that Cherokee women had before colonization to form a basis for Wilma Mankiller's election as principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

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[10]Allen, Scared Hoop, 2, 3.

CHAPTER III

CHEROKEE WOMEN BEFORE AND AFTER COLONIZATION

The position of women in Native American culture was shattered by the arrival of Europeans in North America. European phallocentric culture clashed with the woman-centered culture of many Native American tribes. The demise of the power and authority of women was inevitable. How this came about can best be exemplified by an examination of the economic, social, and political position of women in Cherokee society[1] before white contact and after colonization, ending with the removal of the Cherokees from Georgia to land west of the Mississippi designated as Indian Territory.

Since the indigenous inhabitants of the North American continent did not keep written records but relied upon oral tradition to pass information from generation to generation, Cherokee origins have been the subject of much debate by historians, anthropologists, and archeologists. One theory regarding their origin, based upon linguistic evidence, suggests that the Cherokees migrated south from somewhere around the Great Lakes. According to Wilma

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[1]The status of women in the total configuration of Cherokee culture is made up of all the positions she occupies. It is a collection of rights and duties.

Mankiller, there is a strong tribal belief of Cherokee genesis in the Southeast. Still others contend that they came from South America by following a long migration trail north, then east, then south, finally ending in the Great Smokey Mountains. In support of this theory Cherokee legend portrays the Cherokees as originating on an island off the South American coast.[2]

Prior to European arrival, the Cherokees occupied a large portion of land in the Allegheny region in what is now the southeastern United States. They lived in parts of the present states of North and South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Virginia, and West Virginia. For information about how they lived in their ancestral homeland, we are forced to rely upon the written observations of the early European male explorers, missionaries, and such individuals as James Mooney and James Adair. Mooney was a nineteenth-century anthropologist who became one of the foremost authorities on American Indian life and history. While on the staff of the Bureau of American Enthnology he wrote an essay entitled "The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees," (!885). Twelve years later he published Myths of the Cherokees. James Adair was an Irish trader who lived among the Cherokees for forty years in the eighteenth century.

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[2]Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, Mankiller: A Chief and Her People (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 18.

Since these early observations derived from a Eurocentric perspective, caution must be taken concerning the validity of their accounts. A view of Native American women through a patriarchal lens gives a distorted picture of their position in Native American society. For example, when Europeans first came in contact with American Indian women, they described them as "beasts of burden for their men."[3] They saw men involved in hunting, fishing, and fighting (pastimes of upper-class European men) and women out tilling the fields. From their male Eurocentric point of view, farming was man's work and definitely not a suitable occupation for women. What they failed to realize was that in North America, women dominated agricultural production in the tribes of the eastern half of the United States, and Cherokee women were no exception.[4]

The Cherokees in the eighteenth century had a balanced division of labor according to gender. The men hunted and went off to war while the women collected firewood, tanned hides, sewed clothes, cared for the children and prepared the family's food. Although this demonstrates that women occupied a separate sphere from men and implied a level of domesticity (a nineteenth-century definition of domesticity), their sphere extended beyond the home to

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[3]Theresa Arnott and Julie Matthaei, "Before the 'Trail of Tears'," Ms, November/December 1990, 82.

[4]Joan M. Jensen, "Native American Women and Agriculture: Seneca Case Study," in Unequal Sisters, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 51.

economic activities that appeared to Europeans inappropriate for women.[5] For women to be actively involved in farming was unconscionable to the European male mind set. It would seem that anything outside the realm of European experience or anything that deviated from their definition of acceptable behavior was suspect, and should be dealt with accordingly.

The Cherokees depended equally on hunting and farming. Since women were the farmers, they contributed to the economic support of the tribe. While women did most of the manual labor, men provided assistance in clearing the fields and helped with the planting. Although women occasionally accompanied men on hunting parties, hunting was primarily relegated to the men and farming was the domain of women.[6] This sexual division of labor appeared inequitable to most European observers. One Frenchman, Louis-Philippe (later king of France), who toured Cherokee country in 1797, commented, "The Indians have all the work done by women. They are assigned not only household tasks; even the corn, peas, beans, and potatoes are planted, tended, and preserved by the women."[7]

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[5]Theda Perdue, "Southern Indians and the Cult of True Womanhood," in The Web of Southern Social Relations, ed. Walter J. Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr. and Jon L. Wakelyn (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 36.

[6]For more information about women's work see James Adair, Adair's History of the American Indian, ed. Samuel Cole Williams (Johnson City, Tennessee: Watauga Press, 1930), 434-41, 447, 453-56.

However, women did not feel oppressed nor did they perceive their work as servile or mundane. A missionary in the early nineteenth century noted, "Though custom attached the heaviest part of the labor to the women, yet they were cheerful and voluntary in performing it. What others have discovered among the Indians I cannot tell, but though I have been about nineteen years among the Cherokees, I have perceived nothing of that slavish, servile fear, on the part of women, so often spoke of."[8] Perhaps one reason why Cherokee women worked willingly and with such enthusiasm was that they received recognition for the economic contributions necessary for the survival of their community. Women also controlled the fruits of their labor. In the eighteenth century when Europeans needed to purchase corn, they bought it directly from Indian women.[9]

Not only did Cherokee women have dominion over what they produced, they also owned the agricultural tools, garden plots, fields, livestock, and horses.[10] Judith Brown has asserted that women need to be the producers in agricultural society as well as the controllers of the means of production in order

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[7]Louis-Philippe, Diary of My Travels in America, trans. Stephen Becker (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977), 73.

[8]Perdue, 36.

[9]Ibid., 36-37.

[10]Arnott and Matthaei, 82.

to achieve public power.[11] Peggy Sanday concurs, suggesting that women achieve public power if they are actively involved in economic production.[12] Thus, the balanced division of labor in early Cherokee society in which women had jurisdiction over both the means of production and the distribution of the produce gave them a great deal of power in the public sphere.

The traditional gynocentric lifestyle of the Cherokees further enhanced the status of Cherokee women. In gynocracies (women-centered tribal societies) matrilineaity and matrifocality are prominent features of traditional tribal life. In matrilineal kinship systems descent and inheritance are traced through the mother. A child belonged[13] to his/her mother's lineage and the most important man in a child's life was his/her mother's brother. The maternal uncle, not the father, was responsible for disciplining the children.[14]

In most gynocratic societies, women freely chose spouses, and had the option to divorce at will. When a couple married, the man went to live with the

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[11]For a more in depth discussion see Judith K. Brown, "Economic Organization and the Position of Women Among the Iroquois," Ethnohistory 17, no. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1970): 151-67 and "A Note on the Division of Labor by Sex," American Anthropologist 72, no. 5 (October 1970): 1073-78.

[12]Peggy R. Sanday, "Female Status in the Public Domain," in Women, Culture and Society, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974), 189-206.

[13]A child "belonged" not in the sense that he/she was owned by the family but was instead an irrevocable member of his/her mother's family.

[14]Theda Perdue, "The Traditional Status of Women," Furman Studies 12 (1980): 19-25.

woman's family. When a couple separated, the husband returned to his mother's house, and the wife retained full custody of the children. John Lawson, the author of an early history of Carolina, was surprised that "two Indians that have liv'd together as Man and Wife, in which time they have had several Children; if they part, and another man posses her all the Children go with the Mother and none with the Father."[15]

The lack of strigent punishment for adultery was yet another affront to European sensibilities. The premarital sexual freedom of Cherokee women continued after marriage. Although adultery was grounds for divorcee, there were no laws against adulterous behavior. James Adair commented, "[they] allow their women full liberty to plant their brows with horns as oft as they please, without fear of punishment."[16]

Although Cherokee women were dominant in domestic matters and had a great deal of freedom, it was in the political arena that their power was the most impressive. Cherokee women had a voice at Council meetings and their opinions were highly valued by the men. Women's active participation in Cherokee government threatened the European male-dominated government. James Adair felt obliged to demean Cherokee men by accusing them of living

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[15] John Lawson, A New Voyage to Carolina, ed. Hugh T. Lefler (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 192.

[16] Williams, 152-53.

under petticoat government, that is, under the influence of the Women's Council of the Cherokee.[17] The head of the council was the Beloved Woman of the Nation, "whose voice was considered that of the Great Spirit, speaking through her."[18]

The Woman's Council was a separate entity with the authority to wage war and to decide the fate of captives. Cherokee women had the right to bear arms and to speak in the Men's Council. They were part of any decisions affecting public policy.[19] In the twentieth century this inclusion of women in the affairs of the Cherokee Nation would be a pivotal factor in the election of Wilma Mankiller as principal chief of the Cherokkees.

It is not surprising that the early Europeans were shocked and appalled at the behavior of the Native people. Everything they saw was beyond their range of experience. The sexual freedom of Indian women was both welcomed and criticized. European men were not above taking advantage of the sexual freedom of Indian women. John Lawson recounts how one of his men took an Indian "wife" for the night. In the morning both his bride and his shoes were gone.[20]

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[17]John Adair's remark is reported in Carolyn Thomas Foreman, Indian Women Chiefs (Muskogee, Oklahoma: Hoffman, 1966).

[18]Paula Gunn Allen, "Sky Woman and Her Sister," Ms, September/October 1992, 22.

[19]Allen, The Sacred Hoop, 36-37.

The Europeans were fond of comparing the Cherokee women to Amazons. Perhaps they felt threatened and intimidated by women who were capable of thinking and acting on their own behalf and who could excel at "manly" enterprises. Europeans had difficulty accepting the existence of women fighters. Among the Cherokees was Da'nawa-gasta, or "Sharp War," an especially tough warrior and head of a woman's military society.[21] Although female fighters were not unusual in many tribes, women became more involved in the fight once the necessity of warfare was imposed upon their people by Euro-Americans. For instance, Buffalo Calf Robe (Cheyenne) fought in both the Battle of the Rosebud in 1876 and during the 1878 Cheyenne Breakout, distinguishing herself against such acclaimed generals as General George Crook and General Custer.[22]

Thus, not only Cherokee women, but women in other tribes confounded Europeans by their deviation from socially prescribed female roles in European cultures. Cherokee women shared equally with men, occupying important and influential positions in their tribe's economic, social and political institutions.

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[20]John Lawson, Lawson's History of North Carolina, ed. Francis Latham Harris (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1937), 37-38.

[21]Carolyn Thomas Foreman, Indian Women Chiefs (Muskogee, Oklahoma: Hoffman Publishing Co., 1954), 85.

[22]M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey, "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in North America," in The State of Native America, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 316.

They inherited their clan identity from their mothers and all material possessions passed through the maternal family. Cherokee women enjoyed personal sexual freedom both inside and outside of marriage and retained custody of their children in the event of divorce. Politically they had a voice in decisions regarding internal policies and relations with outsiders. The Women's Council had the power to start and stop wars and to determine the life and death of captives. Unfortunately, the European patriarchal tradition could not sustain a relationship with a culture that allowed women to make decisions at every level of society. Eurocentric prejudice viewed anything that was not similar to their governmental structure as uncivilized. Thus the gynocratic egalitarianism of the Cherokees could not be legitimized nor could it co-exist with the European phallocentric, hierarchical system. The colonizers needed to formulate a course of action that would obliterate the power of women in Cherokee economic, social, and political institutions.[23]

During the British colonization of the Cherokees in the early eighteenth century, young men were taken to England to be educated in English ways. This indoctrination in the proper social, economic, and political structure that advocated male dominance and female submissiveness, the cornerstone of

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[23]Allen, Sacred Hoop, 40-42; Perdue, "The Traditional Status of Women," 19-24.

European society, was a foreshadowing of the fate that was to befall the matrifocal structure of Cherokee culture.[24]

Furthermore, the shift from a subsistence economy to a market economy based on the fur trade weakened the egalitarian economic structure of the Cherokees. Prior to any significant contact with Europeans, the Cherokees lived in a subsistence economy. The staple crops of corn, beans and squash, tended by the women, were supplemented by hunting deer, turkey, raccoon, and bear by the men. Each household contributed to a common village crib to aid the needy and for ceremonial and town governmental activities. Once the basic needs were met, there was no need to create a surplus. The Cherokees, like most southeastern nations, did not believe in the accumulation of wealth and were contemptuous of those who were penurious. Generosity was considered a virtue and material wealth was shunned.[25] However, this changed with the introduction of the fur trade. Now Cherokee men were obliged to hunt in excess of their basic needs to trade skins and furs for European manufactured goods such as textiles, hatchets, hoes, paint, glass beads, and axes.[26] Gradually, the lure of European commodities began to erode traditional Cherokee values

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[24]Samuel Carter III, Cherokee Sunset (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976), 9.

[25]Duane Champagne, Social Order and Political Change (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992),52-53.

[26]For more information see Geroge Quimby, Indian Culture and European Trade Goods (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 8-11.

causing them to develop more acquisitive habits. The Cherokees began adopting the vices of the white man.

During this stage of colonization (early eighteenth century), the Cherokees lacked a national form of government headed by a principal chief with the power to exercise coercive authority in decision making. James Adair observed that "as the law of nature appoints no frail mortal to be a king, or ruler, over his brethren. . . . the Indians, therefore, have no such titles or persons, as emperors, or kings; nor an appellative for such, in any of their dialects. Their highest title, either in military or civil life, signifies only a *Chieftain* [sic]: they have no words to express despotic power, arbitrary kings, oppressed or obedient subjects."[27]

The Cherokee political system consisted of town councils.[28] Each town was a distinct political unit in which everyone participated. Each person had the opportunity to speak on any given issue until a consensus was reached. Consensus was determined not by vote but by lack of opposition. If certain individuals could not agree with the arguments that the majority proposed, they simply excused themselves from the meeting and were not bound by the

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[27]Williams,406-7.

[28]A town consisted of all the poeple who used a single ceremonial center including individuals who may have lived at some distance from the center. See Frederick O. Gearing, Priests and Warriors: Social Structures for Cherokee Politics in the Eighteenth Century (Mensha, Wisconsin: American Anthropological Association, 1962) for more information.

decision reached.[29] The town councils did not act on such issues as homicide or family strife. These issues were dealt with by the clans and settled according to customary law.[30]

Although the town council was made up of everyone who inhabited the town, it was dominated by three groups of elder men. The most important group was the priest-chief and his assistants, followed by a group of seven elders (one from each of the seven clans that resided in each town) who formed the inner advisory council. The third group consisted of the senior men called "beloved men." The elders may have been dominant in the proceedings but had no real power to coerce others into accepting their position.[31]

While each of the towns acted independently, they shared a common culture, language, and history. But, more importantly, the Cherokee were conjoined into one nation and one people by the legal and social structure of clanship. Clans were enatic (related through the mother), and descent was matrilineal. A Cherokee belonged to his/her mother's clan. So long as a Cherokee knew who his/her mother was, he/she could identify his/her clan.

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[29]Robert S. Cotterill, The Southern Indians: The Story of the Civilized Tribes Before Removal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 9.

[30]John Phililp Reid, A Law of Blood (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 51-52.

[31]Frederick O. Gearing, Priests and Warriors: Social Structures for Cherokee Politics in the 18th Century (Menasha, Wisconsin: American Anthropological Association, 1962), 21-24.

However, a clan was more than a family. It was an arm of government to which all police power was entrusted. Therefore, if non-Indians were adopted into a clan, they gained both social standing and legal protection. The clan defended them in life. If they were killed, their death was avenged.[32]

Also, taboos, privileges, and customary social controls were derived from the clan's social structure. These determined "with whom [a Cherokee] might jest, whom he had to respect, to whom he deferred, whom he might assault under what circumstances, and how he addressed each individual."[33] The clans provided a set of formalized behavior patterns that bound them together. From adherence to these rules by the members of the seven clans, the clans received their strength. This in turn provided Cherokee laws with power and force. Unfortunately, as the Cherokees became more willing to adopt white rules of government, the force and energy of the clans began to wane, and women's power began to gradually erode.

As the eighteenth century progressed and trade with the English accelerated, the Cherokee began to feel the need for a more centralized form of government. The English insisted upon treating the Cherokees as a single

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[32]Reid, 37-38.

[33]Ibid., 234.

political entity.[34] For example, by 1715, trade between Carolina and the Cherokees trade was escalating. In order to carry out satisfactory trade and political relations with the Cherokees, Carolina decided to appoint a central leader. Thus, between 1725 and 1752, they named several different warriors as "emperor" of the Cherokees. Naturally, they selected only males.

These appointed chiefs had no real authority among the Cherokees, but acted as intermediaries in trade and diplomatic negotiations with the English. In 1752 the head chief of Chota, Old Hop, announced to Carolina that Chota was now the official center of the Cherokee nation and most Cherokee villages deferred to Chota's authority. The head chief of Chota became the principal chief of the nation and the second chief became second chief of the nation.[35] However, the principal chief remained dependent upon the consensus and support of the national council.

The Cherokees formed a tribal council (also referred to as the national council) on the same model as the town council and included the entire Cherokee population. Influential men, young and old, representing all the Cherokee towns occupied the Council seats. They were chosen based upon

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[34]V. Richard Persico, Jr., "Early Nineteenth-Century Cherokee Political Organization," in The Cherokee Indian Nation, ed. Duane H. King (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 96.

[35]Champagne, 56-58.

their reputation in their respective towns as well as throughout the Nation.[36] Although meetings were open to the entire population, it was more expedient to send representatives from each of the towns to express their position on a particular issue. However, decisions reached by consensus were difficult to achieve and implement. In particular, the tribal government had difficulty controlling the attacks of young warriors on white settlers. As a possible solution they added a group of distinguished warriors to the tribal council in 1768. The Head Warrior was given the judicial powers previously held by priests enabling him to use religiously condoned coercive power to constrain and punish violators of treaty agreements with the colonists.[37]

With the opening of Kentucky to white settlers and the beginning of the American Revolution, this measure proved ineffectual. Many young warriors found the decision of the traditional war leaders to remain neutral during the American Revolution and to refrain from raiding white settlements unacceptable, and chose withdrawal. These warriors moved south with their families to form the Chickamauga towns, and continued their attacks on white settlers until 1794.[38] Already the storm clouds of unrest and dissension were forming that would later

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[36]Ibid., 89-98.

[37]Ibid.,70.

[38]Persico, 97-98.

prove fatal to Cherokee unity. The moral fiber of the Cherokees was also being jeopardized. The increase in the coercive authority of the warrior chiefs led to the use of bribery. European powers supplied goods, such as knives, blankets, guns, hatchets to particular chiefs to recruit supporters for their military expeditions.[39] As a result war chiefs became wealthy and greed replaced the previously revered value of generosity.

By the onset of the American Revolutionary War, Chota was the center for leadership over trade and diplomatic relations. However, it had only limited authority over blood revenge which remained the province of the clans. Although the clans urged Cherokee neutrality during the American Revolution, a group of warrior leaders and villages, the Chickamaugas, saw this as an opportunity to drive the colonists out of Cherokee territory. The old rules still applied whereby individuals could withdraw from the council meeting and not be bound by the decision of the national council. The Chickamaugas towns chose not to abide by the council's decision of neutrality and sided with the British in the war against the Colonists. Since the Cherokee national council did not wish to be responsible for the actions the Chickamaugas, they had no choice but to disclaim them as part of the Cherokee nation.[40]

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[39]Emmet Starr, History of the Cherokee Indians (Oklahoma City: Warden, 1921), 303-304.

[40]Champagne, 76.

When the American Revolution ended (1783), the new American government insisted on treating the Cherokees as a single political entity. Therefore, they extracted compensation in the form of land cessions, often forcibly through bribery and/or coercion, from the entire Cherokee nation for the actions of one group. By 1783, Cherokee territory, originally encompassing 124,000 square miles, was reduced by almost 60 percent. By 1819, the Cherokees retained only 17,000 square miles. The first land cessions in 1721 were voluntary. However, after the American Revolution, force, bribery, and coercion were the preferred methods of land acquisition.[41]

For a time the early United States policy of land seizure was replaced by a policy of so called civilizing the Cherokees first put forth by George Washington's Secretary of War, Henry Knox. It was aimed at "transforming the wandering hunter who owned land communally, governed himself by barbaric custom, worshipped spirits, and spoke a 'savage' language into a sedentary farmer who owned land individually, governed himself by written law, worshipped the one true God, and spoke English learned in proper schools."[42] Essentially, the Cherokees had to revise their traditional culture. They had to abandon

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[41]William L. Anderson, Cherokee Removal (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991),vii-viii; Bernard Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 171; Ronald N. Satz, American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 110-11.

[42]Anderson, viii.

hunting, discard their language, disavow their woman-centered spirituality, jettison their tribal organizations, and reject their customs. This was an extremely high price to pay to become "civilized."

Civilizing the Cherokees meant transforming gender roles. With the destruction of their hunting grounds and the diminished supply of game for trade, Cherokee men had no choice but to turn to raising livestock and farming. Spinning and weaving became the new occupation for Cherokee women. The United States government offered to furnish the Cherokees with hoes, plows, cotton seeds, spinning wheels, and looms. However, this philanthropic gesture camouflaged a more devious plan to wrest more land from the Cherokees. Knox, and later others, believed that if the Cherokees exchanged hunting for farming their hunting grounds would become surplus land available to white settlers. They also reasoned that in the Cherokees' wish for acculturation they would gladly cede land for funds to develop education, agriculture, and other civilized endeavors.[43]

However, the majority of the Cherokees were not amenable to this arrangement. The men did raise herds of cattle, but the women continued to do most of the farming. In addition, Cherokee women planted cotton and excelled at spinning and weaving, surprising government agents with their industry. Only

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[43]Ibid.

a small minority of Cherokees, who had acquired the materialistic mentality of whites, saw the government's program as an opportunity to increase their personal wealth by investing in privately owned agricultural improvements and commercial enterprises.[44] This highly acculturated group was primarily made up of mixed- blood Cherokees.

By the nineteenth century the composition of the Cherokees had changed from predominately pure bloods or fullbloods to a mixture of Indian and white. Early fur traders, followed by British officers and agents married Cherokee women and were accepted into the clans. Their descendants were mixed-bloods who became active in Cherokee councils thereby enabling them to promote the idea of acculturation.[45]

By the 1830s, this group, including John Ridge and Elias Boudinot,[46] built magnificent homes, favored missionary education for their children and supported the cult of domesticity for their daughters and wives. These men and others among the economic elite realized that a man's status was enhanced if

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[44]Perdue, "Southern Indians," 40.

[45]Carter, 22.

[46]John Ridge and Elias Boudinot later supported Cherokee removal to land west of the Mississippi. For more information on both men see Grant Foreman, ed. Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953); Glen Fleischmann, The Cherokee Removal, 1838: An Entire Indian Nation is Forced Out of Its Homeland (New York: Watts, 1971); Thurman Wilkins, Cherokee Tragedy: The Story of the Ridge Family and the Decimination of a People (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

his wife and daughter followed the socially prescribed tenets of the cult of domesticity--purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity.[47]

Protestant missionaries, welcomed by the Cherokees, instructed Cherokee females in the cult of domesticity. In the mission schools boys and girls studied the same academic subjects--reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, geography, and history. However, girls were specifically instructed in the domestic arts--setting tables, cooking, sewing, knitting, and quilting.[48] The missionaries also encouraged marriage and bemoaned the traditional custom of divorce at the will of either partner. The Cherokees adopted new moral standards by outlawing polygamy and setting severe penalties for abortion.[49]

Purity, as defined by the missionaries, was a bit harder to achieve among Cherokee females. For example, at social or ceremonial events, which might last all night, it was considered acceptable behavior for young people to tease, tickle and exchange clothing with members of the other sex and appropriate clan. This behavior came to be viewed as obscene by their religious teachers

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[47]Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," in Major Problems in American Women's History, ed. Mary Beth Norton (Lexington, Massachusetts and Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company, 1989), 122-28 discusses the Euro-American ideal of domesticity.

[48]Perdue, "Southern Indians," 41.

[49]Mary E.Young, "Women, Civilization, and the Indian Question," in Clio Was A Woman, ed. Mable E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980),107. For a further discussion on polgyamy and abortion see chapter 5, "A Family Writ Large," in A Law of Blood, ed. John Phillip Reid (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 35-45.

and students were suspended from school if reported. The missionaries also objected to boys and girls being alone together, and males and females usually attended separate classes.[50]

The paternalistic Christian desire to civilize the "heathens" in the early nineteenth century required that females study the Scriptures. At weekly prayer meetings Cherokee females received instruction in the Lord's Prayer, hymns, and catechism. As true women, mothers were the moral guardians of the home. They must, as mothers and future mothers of Cherokee statesmen and leaders, learn the Bible in order to teach their children the white man's religion.[51]

Cherokee women who had once distinguished themselves in battles during the eighteenth century were now occupied with Bible study class, proper deportment, home decorating, sewing circles. They were busy being true women, submissive to fathers and husbands, leaving little time or interest for political matters. If the United States government thought it was doing Cherokee women a favor by freeing them from outdoor work and placing them in the home, they were mistaken. In fact, they deprived women of their economic independence and political responsibility.

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[50]William H. Gilbert, Jr., "Eastern Cherokee Social Organization," in Social Anthropology of the North American Tribes, ed. Fred Eggan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955),305; Young, "Women, Civilization," 107; Perdue, "Southern Indians," 43.

[51]Grace Steele Woodward, The Cherokees (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963),141.

The nuclear family replaced the extended family. Women, preoccupied with their individual families, had little time to develop ties with other women. This situation was exacerbated by migration from towns to rural areas. Homesteads were established with fenced-in land for farming and cattle herds. Women were forced into an isolated existence with only their husbands and children in the household.

Besides robbing women of economic independence, the United States government persuaded Cherokee leaders to pass legislation that greatly reduced the power of the clans and excluded women from the political process. In 1808, the Cherokees recorded the first written law which established a national police force, called Lighthorse, to protect property and to insure the inheritance rights of widows and children. The rights were for the children as heirs to their fathers' property. This clearly established the patriarchal family as norm.[52] Two years later the Cherokee Council ruled to outlaw the practice of blood vengeance.

The action of blood revenge by the clans threatened treaty agreements with the United States government because the Cherokees were held collectively responsible for the actions of individuals. For instance, if a

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[52]Theda Perdue, "Cherokee Women and the Trail of Tears," in Unequal Sisters, 2d ed., ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol Du Bois (New York and London: Routledge, 1994),34-35; Champagne 95-99. Also see Laws of the Cherokee Nation: Adopted by the Council at Various Times, Reprinted for the Benefit of the Nation Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, 1852), 3-4.

Cherokee was killed by an American, clan law required retaliation. However, such action might be construed as a breach of treaty and could lead to war with the Americans. The Cherokees were also concerned with preserving the land base guaranteed by treaty. They preferred to maintain peaceful relations with the United States government.[53]

Shortly after the first treaties in the 1790s, Americans began to request land cessions from the Cherokees on an annual basis. Several Cherokee chiefs, influenced by bribery, signed treaties ceding more and more land. Some even suggested that the Cherokees should become American citizens, and that the land should be allotted to male heads of families.[54]

However, Return Jonathan Meigs, the United States agent to the Cherokees, had a better idea. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, he advised President Jefferson that the Cherokees should exchange their eastern land for western land and move west to territory in present-day Arkansas. A few Cherokees accepted Jefferson's offer while others, like John Ross, remained vehemently opposed. In this, the first removal crisis (1806-809), the Cherokees faced the possibility of schism and separatism. They needed to re-establish a sense of unification, of identity. Thus the Cherokee created a national executive

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[53]Champagne 92-97.

[54]Ibid.

committee in 1809 uniting the factions and declaring anyone who chose to emigrate an expatriate.[55]

Cherokee women were especially distressed over the idea of further land cession and removal. In 1817 a group of women met in their own council to discuss allotment and delivered the following message to the National Council:

> . . . . We have raised all of you on the land which we now have, which God gave us to inhabit and raise provisions. We know that our country has once been extensive but by repeated sales has become circumscribed to a small tract and never have thought it our duty to interfere in the disposition of it till now[,] if a father or mother was to sell all their lands which they had to depend on[,] which their children had to raise their living on[,] which would be bad indeed and to be removed to another country. We do not wish to go to an unknown country which we have understood some of our children wish to go over the Mississippi but this act of our children would be like destroying your mothers. Your mothers and sisters ask and beg of you not to part with any more of our lands.[56]

When this same subject of allotting land and removal was placed on the agenda of the National Council in 1818, the women again responded:

> We have heard with painful feelings that the bounds of the land we now possess are to be drawn into very narrow limits. The land was given to us by the Great Spirit above as our common right, to raise our children upon, & to make support for our rising generations. We therefore humbly petition our beloved children, the head men and warriors, to hold out to the last in support of our common rights, as the Cherokee nation have been the first settlers of this land; we therefore claim the right of soil. . . . We therefore

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[55]Ibid., 98; William G. McLoughlin, "Thomas Jefferson and the Beginning of Cherokee Nationalism, 1806 to 1809," The William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 32 (May 1975): 548-49.

[56]Perdue, "Cherokee Women," 35. Perdue is quoting from Presidential Papers Microfilm: Andrew Jackson (Washington, 1961), Series 1, Reel 22; also mentioned in Journal of Cyrus Kingsbury, 13 February, 1817, Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

unanimously join in our meeting to hold our country in common as hitherto.[57]

Unfortunately, women's voices ceased to be heard in Cherokee councils after the adoption of the Cherokee Constitution in 1827 which stated, "No person but a free male citizen who is full grown shall be entitled to vote."[58] Clearly women were not included. The final obliteration of the power of women in Cherokee society was accomplished. What effect would this have on the future of the Cherokee Nation? Would the loss of the women's voices, who so vehemently opposed allotment and removal, hasten the process of removal?

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century the Cherokees had made remarkable changes in their economic, social, and political institutions. Although they retained their concept of communal ownership of land, individuals became successful farmers. They also established a prosperous merchant class. They developed a written language based on Sequoyah's alphabet. They had a newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix, published in Cherokee and English. By 1827 the Cherokees had a constitution that mirrored that of the Republic. It provided a centralized form of government with a principal chief, a vice-chief, a two house legislature, and a supreme court. In fact they had become so

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[57]Ibid., Brainard Journal, 30, June, 1818 (American Board Papers, see footnote 61).

[58]Laws of the Cherokee Nation, 79.

"civilized" that they were in danger of surpassing their white neighbors. The Cherokees felt they were justified in thinking themselves equal to whites.

Unfortunately, the Cherokees not only incorporated the positive attributes of white society but also one very specific negative characteristic--sexism. Cherokee women became second-class citizens and acculturated Cherokee men expected them to be submissive to their fathers and husbands and domesticated like white women. The Cherokee Constitution of 1827 disenfranchised women and excluded them from all government offices.

Would this erosion of the power and status of women upset the balance and harmony that was a fundamental part of the traditional Cherokee world-view? The Cherokees believed that "the world existed in a precarious balance that only right or wrong actions kept it from tumbling. Wrong actions could disrupt the balance."[59] The Cherokees learned this from Charley, the prophet who, according to oral tradition, had received the message from the Great Spirit, the Creator of Life and Breath. The balance and harmony between Cherokee men and women were disturbed when women were no longer regarded as equals economically, socially, or politically. Would the words of Charley, who warned of death to those who followed the "white man's mills, clothing and culture [and did not] return to the time when they listened to the Great Spirit of

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[59]Mankiller and Wallis, 20.

their Dreams"[60] prove true? Would the eradication of the traditional role of women in Cherokee culture prove fatal?

[60]Ibid., 257.

CHAPTER IV

REMOVAL AND OTHER MALIGNANT ACTS

By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, many of the Cherokees concluded that civilization, as defined by whites, made more sense than clinging to their traditional ways. They embraced Christianity, promoted the building of schools, established a written constitution, and abolished clan revenge. Their 1827 Constitution legally removed women from the public sphere by allowing only free males to vote. Cherokee men became the heads of the household and the nuclear family to the detriment of women and the matrilineal clan system. Men farmed the land, formerly the traditional responsibility of women.

The Cherokees restructured their spiritual, social, economic, and political institutions to replicate those of the dominant white culture. Historian William Anderson suggests that the Cherokee needed to make these changes as a defense mechanism. Through acculturation they hoped to protect their remaining land from further reduction. The Cherokees proved that they were capable of adopting white ways by becoming highly successful farmers, erecting plantation-like edifices, and even owning Black slaves.[1] They demonstrated

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[1]Anderson, viii-ix.

their respect for the United States by aiding Andrew Jackson in the fight against the British and other Indians during the War of 1812. They could no longer be referred to as heathen savages. However, white racial prejudice prevented them from being accepted as equals, and the white man's hunger for Indian land was insatiable. The discovery of gold on Cherokee land and the invention of the cotton gin exacerbated white greed for more land. Lastly, the Creek War of 1813-14 ended any further threat of an Indian alliance against the whites.[2] If the American government's plan for land acquisition was temporarily thwarted by the Cherokees' adaptation to white culture, a new solution was provided by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. This vast tract of land became available, sufficiently distant from white civilization, making it an ideal location for Indian removal. Instead of "civilization" and assimilation of the Indians, the new preoccupation of the U. S. Government became removal.

In the first removal crisis of 1809-10, initiated by Thomas Jefferson, approximately one thousand Cherokees relocated to the Arkansas area. Another two thousand moved there in 1819. The federal government made a treaty with these Cherokees in 1828 and moved them to the northeastern part of present-day Oklahoma in 1832. This group, later referred to as Old Settlers, was joined by another two thousand Cherokees of the Removal Party in 1835.

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[2]William G. McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 7.

Consequently, by 1838 the Cherokees were divided into three factions: the western Cherokees (Old Settlers), the Removal (or Treaty) Party, and the Patriot (anti-removal) Party. The Removal group was led by Major Ridge, his son, John, and his cousin, Elias Boudinot.[3] The Patriot Party was led by John Ross.[4]

The establishment of the national executive committee in 1809 created a sense of Cherokee nationalism and defined the requirement for membership in the Cherokee Nation, residence within the ancestral homeland in the southeastern part of the United States.[5] In addition, several important consensual decisions were made, including refusal to grant any further land cessions, the rejection of Jefferson's offer of removal west, and the termination of membership in the Cherokee Nation for those who did remove. The Cherokees were conscious of the need to present a united front. By maintaining communal ownership of land, protecting the property rights of women through legislation, adhering to the custom of consensus in decision-making, and

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[3]Major Ridge was a hero of the War of 1812, his son was educated in New England, and Boudinot was the former editor of the Cherokee Phoenix.

[4]Although only one-eighth Cherokee by ancestry, John Ross was elected principal chief in 1827 and continued to guide his people until his death in 1866. Both his father and grandfather were traders and businessmen who married Cherokee women. It is from his paternal heritage that he learned how to deal adeptly with white officials. See McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 3, 227-28 and Woodward, The Cherokees, 177-79 for more information.

[5]For a more in-depth discussion of Cherokee nationhood see Frederick O. Gearing, Priests and Warriors: Social Structures for Cherokee Politics in the Eighteenth Century (Menasha, Wisconsin: American Anthropology Association, 1962).

advocating harmony and balance with people and nature, they were denying total assimilation into white culture.[6]

Unfortunately, the U.S. government refused to acquiesce continuing in their quest for Indian removal and in 1817 initiated a treaty with the Cherokees to exchange land in the Southeast for territory west of the Mississippi promising assistance in resettling those who chose to remove.[7] Nearly two thousand Cherokees chose to move West joining those who had already emigrated at the turn of the century and those who had migrated in 1809-10 under Jefferson's proposal.[8]

Although Cherokee women's political power was gradually being extinguished, they made their voices heard by vehemently opposing allotment and removal at the 1816 and 1817 National Council. Nancy Ward, Beloved Woman and head of the Woman's Council, was too old and too ill to attend the Council meeting of 1817. In her place she sent her walking cane as representation of her vote and a letter warning the Cherokees not to part with any more land nor to accede to removal. Her letter proved to be a

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[6]William G. McLoughlin, "Who Civilized the Cherokees," Journal of Cherokee Studies 13 (1988), 77 and "Thomas Jefferson and the Beginning of Cherokee Nationalism, 1806-1809," The William and Mary Quarterly 32, 3d ser. (May 1975), 550.

[7]For the actual terms of the treaty see Charles C. Royce, "The Cherokee Nation of Indians: A Narrative of Their Official Relations with the Colonial and Federal Government," Bureau of American Ethnology, Fifth Annual Report, 1883-84, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 84-85.

[8]William G. McLoughlin, Cherokee Renascence In the New Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 128-45.

foreshadowing of a series of treaties that robbed the Cherokees of their land, culminating in the infamous Trail of Tears.[9]

Nancy Ward was the last Beloved Woman of the Cherokees. She earned her title "Ghighau" or "Beloved Woman" for her courage in the battle of Taliwa, new Canton, Georgia in 1755 where the Cherokees were victorious over the Creeks. Nancy accompanied her husband, Kingfisher, to the battle. During the heat of battle, after Kingfisher was shot and killed, Nancy took up his weapon and rallied the Cherokees on to victory.[10] As Beloved Woman she was the head of the Woman's Council, had a voting seat in the National Council, and acted as a negotiator in treaty talks. According to Cherokee legend the Great Spirit often spoke through the Beloved Woman thus assuring that her words were always heard, but not always followed.[11]

Among her responsibilities as Beloved Woman was her duty to prepare the Black Drink, an emetic holly tea, which all the warriors were required to drink before going into battle. She had complete power to decide the fate of prisoners of war. Nancy firmly exercised this power in her rescue of Mrs. William Bean,

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[9]Norma Tucker, "Nancy Ward, Ghighau of the Cherokee," Georgia Historical Quarterly 53 (June 1969): 197-98. For a copy of her letter see Carolyn Foreman, Indian Women Chiefs (Muskogee, Oklahoma: Hoffman, 1966), 79-80.

[10]Ben Harris McClary, "Nancy Ward: The Last Beloved Woman of the Cherokees," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 2, no. 21 (1962): 354; Sharon Malinowski, ed., Nativee American Women (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1995), 273.

[11]Henry Thompson Malone, Cherokees of the Old South (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1956), 16; McClary, 355.

wife of Tennessee's first permanent settler, from a fiery death at the stake. She told the braves assembled for the burning that, "No woman shall be burned at the stake while I am Beloved Woman."[12]

During her lifetime, Ward saved many white lives and participated in several treaty negotiations. She hoped that as the Cherokees learned the white ways of farming and raising livestock, they could live peacefully together. Unfortunately, the white man's thirst for Indian land was unquenchable and in the Hiwassee Purchase of 1819, the Cherokees sold all of their land north of the Hiwassee River in Tennessee, including Chote where she lived. She was forced to move and settle by the Ocowee River near the present town of Benton, Tennessee. Until her death in 1822, she ran an inn for travelers on the Ocowee River's Womankiller Ford.[13]

Before her death, Nancy Ward may have realized that the Cherokees had learned the white man's ways too well. Their culture was changing. Many had accepted the Euro-American capitalist values of residing on rich plantations and owning slaves.[14] The kinship system of the clans was replaced by a republican form of government in which women had no political voice. Ward may have

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[12]McClary, 357. Mrs. Bean was captured on her way to Fort Casweel by Dragging Canoe's braves. They were avenging the deaths of fellow braves killed in an ambush by white men.

[13]Ibid., 361-62; Malinowski, 273.

[14]For an excellent discussion of the place of slavery in Cherokee society see Theda Perdue, Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society 1540-1866 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979).

envisioned the future that Charley, the prophet, had warned against. In her final act she strongly admonished the Cherokees to hold steadfast to their land and to resist the pressures of the white man.

Unfortunately, the pressure for removal accelerated when the issue of states' rights was introduced. The United States government's intent to create the social homogenization of white and Indian culture and transform and incorporate the Indian into the white society was anathema to Georgians who refused to accept the idea of a state within a state.[15] Georgia was annoyed with the federal government for not implementing the Compact of 1802. This agreement stated that Georgia would give up its claim to western lands in exchange for the federal government's promise to void Indian titles to all lands within the state of Georgia.[16]

The election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1828 provided Georgia with a staunch ally. He supported states' rights over treaty rights. Jackson chose to disregard the Supreme Court's decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), which stated that the Cherokees were "a domestic, dependent nation," and Justice Marshall's decision in *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832). The latter denied the constitutionality of Georgia's laws and proclaimed that federal

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[15]Bernard W. Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 250.

[16]Anderson, xi.

authority superseded states' rights concerning Indian treaties.[17] Jackson stated his opinion of the Chief Justice's ruling with the challenge, "John Marshall has rendered his decision; now let him enforce it."[18]

Shortly after Jackson's election he convinced Congress to pass the Indian Removal Bill (1830), making it almost impossible for an eastern tribe to avoid ceding its land and moving to Indian Territory. Cherokee leaders, alarmed by this latest development, enjoined their people to remain united and deplored betrayal. Their voices echoed with one phrase, "United we stand, divided we fall."[19] Sadly, unity was threatened when it was learned that Chief John Ross had rejected the government's offer of $3,000,000 for the Cherokee land in Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. A group was formed, later referred to as the Treaty Party, lead by John Ridge, Major Ridge, Elias Boudinot, and Stand Watie in favor of accepting the government's offer. This group had been meeting with the Jackson-Georgia "removal machine" faction between 1832-1835.[20] Consequently , on December 29, 1835, the fraudulent treaty of removal was signed at New Echota by one hundred persons. By the terms of this agreement

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[17]McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 1.

[18]Woodward, 171.

[19]Ibid., 158. Woodward notes that the phrase is credited to an American George Pope Morris.

[20]Ibid., 175.

John Ridge and his followers, unofficially acting on behalf of the Cherokee Nation,

> ceded, relinquished, and conveyed to the United States all the lands owned, claimed, or possessed by the Nation east of the Mississippi River. In consideration for the lands five million dollars were to be expended, paid, and invested in the manner stipulated and agreed upon.[21]

In addition, as stipulated in the Cherokee Treaty of 1835, the western lands that were to be their new home "shall in no future time, without their consent, be included within the territorial limits of jurisdiction of any State or Territory." These words would eventually prove worthless with the passage of The Curtis Act of 1898, and the petition of white settlers for Oklahoma statehood.

For the next three years, John Ross pursued every legal alternative to avoid removal. Eventually he was only able to obtain permission for the Cherokees to conduct their own move to Indian Territory and to be reimbursed for the cost. The first of thirteen contingents, held in stockades for four months, began their eight hundred mile journey westward on what was to become known as the Trail of Tears.

Approximately fifteen hundred men, women, and children died in the stockades from epidemics of pleurisy, measles, and whooping cough. Another sisteen hundred died during the journey from constant sickness and exposure to

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[21]Woodward, 190; McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 2.

the elements.[22] The total number of deaths, including those who died shortly after arrival from malnutrition and sickness, was estimated at four thousand.[23]

If women had not been disenfranchised would their vote have prevented removal? The answer can only be conjecture. However, the fact that the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson, blatantly ignored the rulings of the Supreme Court, and signed a fraudulent treaty with an unofficial group of Cherokees, makes it unlikely that he or the state governments would have considered the vote of women. Furthermore, by 1835, many Cherokee women had been well indoctrinated in the Cult of True Womanhood and considered political issues the province of men.[24] The forces of white supremacy, Manifest Destiny, and land greed within the United States made Cherokee removal inevitable.

The Cherokees had adopted the Euro-American system that placed political power in the hands of a wealthy group of acculturated men and made women subordinate. This system had now made these men powerless. Would this experience cause Cherokee leaders to critically re-think their political structure and return political power to Cherokee women?

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[22]For a more precise account see Russell Thornton, "The Demography of the Trail of Tears Period: A New Estimate of Cherokee Population Losses," in Cherokee Removal, Before and After, ed. William L. Anderson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 75-96.

[23]McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 7.

[24]Theda Perdue, "Cherokee Women and the Trail of Tears," 37.

Unfortunately, it was not until the election of Wilma Mankiller as Deputy Chief of the Cherokees in 1983 that the voice of a woman was heard again in the Cherokee Nation. Prior to her election, an elite group of mixed-blood, acculturated Cherokee males dominated the Cherokee Nation. When women were mentioned it was from the viewpoint of these well educated Cherokee men, government agents, and missionaries. For example, progressive Cherokees, including Chief John Ross, sought to emphasize the social skills of the women who graduated from the Cherokee Female Seminary, an institution run by men based on the ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood. Documents written by government agents praised the farming and domestic skills of Cherokee women while missionary records extolled the virtues of women who epitomized Christian values.

When Cherokee women ceased to play an active role in the shaping of the Cherokee Nation, they became invisible to the chroniclers of Cherokee history. The literature took on a decidedly male focus and perspective. Nevertheless, it is informative to discuss certain internal and external events that shaped the Cherokee Nation[25] from 1838 to 1982. These historical events create a picture of a once proud Nation that was reduced to a shadow of its

[25]After removal to Indian Territory the Cherokee Nation refers to those Cherokees located in Oklahoma separate from the Eastern Band of Cherokees located on a reservation of more than 56,000 acres in the mountains of North Carolina.. The Eastern Band are the direct descendants from a small number who avoided removal during the 1830s. They enjoy federal recognition as a tribe but have a separate legal and tribal identitiy from the Oklahoma Cherokees.

former self, and the conditions that Cherokees labored under when Wilma Mankiller assumed leadership as principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

When the survivors of the Trail of Tears arrived in what is now Oklahoma, disillusioned, disheartened and destitute, they faced a new set of problems. The Old Settler Cherokees expected them to accept their government. The assassination of members of the Ridge-Boudinot group by Rossites exacerbated the animosity between the Patriot Party and the Treaty Party. Revenge was sought, and seven years of internal guerrilla warfare ensued. The Nation erupted into a state of terror where murder, barn burning, and robbery by marauding whites and Indians became commonplace. It was not until the federal government threatened to divide the Cherokees into two separate tribes that the opposing sides agreed to put aside their differences and unite as one nation. The Cherokees signed an agreement in 1846 and a tenuous peace settled on the Cherokees lasting until the Civil War.[26]

The period between the Cherokee civil warfare and the American Civil War, approximately 1849 to 1860, was a time of renewed prosperity for the Cherokees. Historians considered this time period to be the Golden Age of the Cherokees.[27] Although the majority of the Cherokees, mainly full-bloods

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[26]McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 5-57.

[27]Rennard Strickland and William Strickland, "Beyond the Trail of Tears: One Hundred Fifty Years of Cherokee Survival," 114, in Cherokee Removal Before and After, ed. William L. Anderson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

remained subsistence farmers, they were no worse off than poor frontier homesteaders. Many of the well-educated and acculturated mixed-bloods resumed the comfortable life of southern gentlemen, owning black slaves and establishing large plantations, while others became traders, merchants, and business people.[28]

During this period Cherokee women were not neglected. An article in the newly re-established and re-named tribal newspaper, the Cherokee Advocate, praised the Cherokees' protection of women's property and marriage rights by law. Cherokee women continued to have the right to own their own property after marriage, the right to a simple divorce, and control of their children unlike, their white sisters.[29] Moreover, the establishment of a Female Seminary (1851), modeled on Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, demonstrated their regard for women.

The education of females had a twofold purpose for the progressive Cherokees. First, they wanted to dispell the white society's image of them as uncivilized, unruly, paganistic savages. Through education the Cherokees wanted to alter this primitive image by "uplifting" the entire tribe, including poor full-bloods, making them a model of white society.[30]

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[28]McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 59, 79.

[29]Ibid., 72; Perdue, "Cherokee Women," 40.

[30]Devon A. Mihesuah, Cultivating the Rosebuds (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 21.

The second reason was the desire of affluent Cherokees to perpetuate the Cult of True Womanhood; a system established by the wealthy white upper class in the antebellum South. For the mixed-blood elitist Cherokees, educated females would not only serve the community but would also make excellent partners for their prominent husbands.[31] While Cherokee girls were being educated in such subjects as Latin, algebra, botany, geography, grammar, and arithmetic, they also remained subservient appendages to Cherokee men.

Unfortunately, the Cherokee Female Seminary served as a breeding ground for classism. The majority of the students were a generation of mixed bloods whose countenance reflected their white ancestry of lighter skin and hair color. These girls felt superior to their more Indian looking full-blood sisters. This distinction exacerbated the growing class system between the progessive and traditional Cherokees.[32] As this system continued to develop and divide the Cherokees, it would acutely manfest itself over a century later during the Swimmer/Mankiller campaign of 1982.

Although a large portion of the Cherokee population adopted white ways, there were many who remained faithful to ancient traditions, customs, and cultural beliefs. They still practiced their tradtional religion and medicine and learned to read and write in Cherokee. They were not illiterate. Since the

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[31]Ibid.

[32]Woodward, 243; Mihesuah, 39.

Cherokee Advocate was printed in Cherokee and English, this segment of the population, mostly full-bloods, were cognizant of tribal affairs, especially those dealing with the United States government. They were well aware of the unrest between the North and the South over the issue of slavery.

Around 1855, the Keetoowah Society formed to unite the full-bloods as keepers of Cherokee traditions and customs, to preserve Cherokee sovereignty, and to promote Cherokee self-determination through consesus. However, their imminent purpose was to prevent the mixed-bloods and their white allies from leading the Cherokee Nation toward sympathizing with the South in the event of war with the North. They feared that many of their English speaking mixed-blood brethern, who owned black slaves, would side with the South. This would antagonize the Northern abolionists and put the Cherokee Nation at grave risk.[33]

Unfortunately, their fears were well founded. The Cherokees became a polarized nation during the American Civil War. Stand Waite, one of the original members of the Treaty Party, became a general in the Confederate army. John Ross, who argued for neutrality, eventually committed the Cherokee Nation to the Confederacy after Union troops withdrew their support in the summer of 1861. With Confederate troops firmly entrenched in Indian Territory, the Cherokee legislature voted to secede from the United States, and John Ross signed a treaty in August 1861 between the Cherokee Nation and the

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[33]McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 156-59.

Confederate government. After the War, this agreement would have dire effects on the Cherokee Nation.[34]

The fighting was fierce, with Cherokees aligned on each side against one another. The Old Settlers joined the Union, among them many Keetoowah families, while Ross and Waite supported the Confederates. John Ross was captured early in the fighting and spent most of the war in Philadelphia. In 1862, he switched sides, angering Stand Waite. In Ross' absence, Waite seized the opportunity to get himself appointed principal chief. He took over the capital at Tahlequah and destroyed John Ross' home.[35] One Cherokee described the situation,

> This war has been disastrous in its effect on the welfare of our people. The operations of our government have been paralyzed by the incursions in an overwhelming force. . . .Our legitimate protection, the government of the United States, was far away and every channel of communication cut off, every military post in our vicinity abandoned. . . . Our wisest men knew not what to do.[36]

After the war the Cherokees were once again disheartened, disillusioned, and divided. The destruction of the land and the decimation of the population was devastating. The American government cared little for those who fought bravely on the side of the Union. They were to be punished equally with those who aided the Confederacy. Two factions divided the Cherokee Nation. There

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[34]Ibid., 207,212.

[35]Strickland and Strickland,115-16.

[36]McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 201.

were those who supported the Union, and those who fought on the side of the Confederacy The "golden age" of the Cherokees was over.[37]

In the summer of 1866, two delegations of Cherokees, Union and Confederate, went to negotiate a treaty with the United States government. Each claimed to represent the Cherokee Nation. By sending two delegations, the Cherokees presented a divided rather than a united front. The fact that Stand Waite served as general for the Confederacy and that the Cherokee legislature voted to secede from the United States also worked against the Cherokees.[38]

Unfortunately, the new United States government did not distinguish between those loyal to the Union, and those who supported the South. It treated the Cherokees as a whole. Once again surrendering land was the penalty for rebellion. The Cherokees forfeited land for future railroad construction, for a series of land openings beginning in 1889 for white settlement that would eventually lead to statehood, and for the relocation of other tribes. The Senate ratified the treaty on July 27, 1866. John Ross died four days later.[39]

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[37]For an account of the devastating effects of the war and the agonies of reconstruction see Bailey M. Thomas, Reconstruction in Indian Territory: A Story of Avarice, Discrimination, and Opportunism (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1972).

[38]Strickland and Strickland, 117.

[39]McLoughlin, After the Trail of Tears, 226; Angie Debo, And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), 6.

John Ross tried to keep the peace between the full-bloods and the mixed-bloods, encouraging the Cherokee ideals of balance, harmony, and unity, while simultaneously encouraging assimilation to white ways. The Cherokees would have to wait until the election of Wilma Mankiller in 1987 before seeing another principal chief with the capabilities and dedication of John Ross.

After the Civil War the Cherokees again embarked on a course of reconstruction. Their first priority was to present a united front in order to resist the white onslaught during the next decades. They needed to end old domestic feuds and hold fast against a common enemy. The railroads now made Indian Territory more accessible to white setters. The vastness of the land provided an ideal environment for squatters. By the end of the twentieth century there were more than a hundred thousand white squatters in Indian Territory not subject to Cherokee laws. The 1889 land run that opened unassigned lands to white settlers ultimately changed the demographics of Indian Territory. Whites were rapidly outnumbering the Native Americans. Unlike 1838, this time there was no place to move the Cherokees.[40]

Land greed by white settlers continued to threaten the Cherokee way of life. All land was held in common by Cherokee citizens and much of their 4,420,068 acres lay fallow. The Cherokees also guarded their natural resources such as coal and timber against aggressive white businessmen. All of this

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[40]Strickland and Strickland, 120.

infuriated the individualistic and exploitative white settlers and entrepreneurs. Bills for the revocation of tribal tenure inundated Congress in the 1880s, forcing the Cherokees to keep a close vigil in Washington.[41]

In 1880, Senator Dawes visited the Cherokees. After commenting favorably on their progress, he noted defects in their philosophy of holding land in common. He believed that it made the Cherokees less inclined to be competitive with their neighbors thereby hindering progress. Thus, in the name of progres tribal ownership of land needed to be abolished and replaced with individual ownership. In 1887, the Dawes Severalty Act or General Allotment Act passed ending tribal tenure by transferring tribal land to individual Native Americans. The law appeared to be designed to assimilate native people into white society by teaching them farming techniques and the value of private ownership. Surplus land would be opened to white settlement; land that was rich in natural resources. Once again, history repeated itself. In the early 1800s, Thomas Jefferson wished to assimilate the Native Americans into white society by encouraging them to accept the ideals of the Republican man that included individual ownership of fenced-in farm land.[42]

In the process of rebuilding their nation, the Cherokees found a way to operate their schools and government without taxing their people. They leased

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[41]Ibid., 118, 121; Debo, 20.

[42]Mankiller and Wallis, 133-34; Ronald Takaki, Iron Cages (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 55.

a section of their land, the Outlet, to Texas cattlemen. The revenue from these leases defrayed school and government costs. Unfortunately, this section of land (6.5 million acres) became the focus of white negotiations for land cessions with the Cherokee Nation under the Indian Appropriations Act of 1889. The Cherokees did not want to sell so large a source of revenue. Consequently, the government employed more coercive measures. On September 19, 1890, by executive order, President Benjamen Harrison closed the Cherokee Outlet to Texas cattlemen. The loss of income greatly weakened the Cherokees financially and forced them to accept an offer from the government of $1.29 per acre for this land.[43]

In 1893, the biggest land run in American history occurred with the opening of the Outlet. Nearly forty thousand claims were available, and the land mongers began their feeding frenzy. This did not satiate the hunger for Cherokee land, and other means for acquisition were created. In 1893, the establishment of the Dawes Commission to procure allotment of the Five Civilized Tribes led to the passage of the Curtis Act in 1898. The Curtis act abolished tribal courts and laws and extended allotment to the Cherokees.[44] In

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[43]Strickland and Strickland, 122; Mankiller and Wallis, 137. It was not until 1961 that an additional 14.7 million was awared to the Cherokee Nation for the Outlet property.

[44]Allotment ended with the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934. See Mankiller and Wallis, 175-77.

1901, the United States bestowed citizenship and voting rights on all Native Americans living in Indian Territory.[45]

The Dawes Commission then had the arduous task of creating a tribal membership roll[46] and allocating 110 acres to each member. The roll consisted of 41,889 full-blooded and mixed-bloods Cherokees, adopted Delawares and Shawnees, and intermarried whites and freedmen. Once the land was allotted, whites began their assault. The Muskogee-Times Democrat reported, "It is almost impossible for an allottee to get to the office without running the gauntlet of grafters that line the pavement of the land office."[47] Land was wrested from the Cherokees in a variety of unconscionable ways. Angie Debo lists "forgery, embezzlement, criminal conspiracy, misuse of notary's seals, and other crimes against Indian property," as some of the methods used. By the beginning of the 1930s depression, most of the Cherokees' land was gone.[48]

The Keetoowahs held out the longest against accepting allotment. They refused to enroll for their tracts of land until 1910. They supported the five civilized tribes in an effort to create a separate Indian state (called Sequoyah) out of the eastern third of Indian Territory. This attempt for a separate but equal

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[45]Debo, 23; Strickland and Strickland, 122; Mankiller and Wallis 268.

[46]Descendents of those listed on the Dawes Commission roll make up today's tribal membership in the Cherokee Nation.

[47]Muskogee-Times Democrat, 10 May 1906.

[48]Debo, 312; Strickland and Strickland, 126.

status failed, and Oklahoma became a state in 1907, combining Indian and Oklahoma territory. Will Rogers commented on the inevitability of Oklahoma statehood. He noted that, "Indians were so cruel they were all killed by civilized white men for encroaching on white domain."[49] After statehood, the Cherokee government ceased to function formally, and the president of the United States appointed their principal chief until 1971.

In the ensuing years after Oklahoma statehood, the Cherokees continued to spiral downward. Lack of funds closed the school system in 1913. The level of poverty, especially among the full-bloods, was acute. Many Cherokees had their land holdings taken from them by unscrupulous individuals leaving them without a means of survival. Both Roosevelt's New Deal programs and the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (1936) were insufficient and ineffectual in relieving the impoverished conditions of the Cherokees. Not until after World War II did the Cherokees begin to see some hope.[50]

The war was a broadening experience for the Cherokees. Thousands left what was familiar and came in contact with other Native Americans and people from other countries with different cultural values and customs. Following the war, the G.I. Bill provided educational opportunities to returning veterans that

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[49]Strickland and Strickland, 124.

[50]Strickland and Strickland, 127; Mankiller and Wallis, 172-76.

otherwise would have been unavailable. The hope of again rebuilding their nation, politically and economically, seemed attainable.[51]

The founding of the Indian Claims Commission (1946) provided the Cherokees with a vehicle for litigating their historic claims. They sought reimbursement from the sale of the Outlet land in 1889. The Claims Commission awarded the Cherokees $19 million to be distributed on a per capita basis to all the individuals or their heirs whose names appeared on the Dawes membership roll. Any unclaimed funds reverted to the Cherokee Nation and was used to begin reconstruction.[52]

After the success of the Outlet case, the Cherokee Nation sought restitution for the Arkansas Riverbed land. Unfortunately, they were only partially successful. The state of Oklahoma repaid the $8 million the Cherokees agreed they owed. However, while Congress found that $150 million was due to the Cherokees, the United States has yet to turn over this amount. The Arkansas Riverbed case became a high priority for Wilma Mankiller during her administration.[53]

Politically, the Cherokees made progress toward restoring tribal sovereignty. In 1938, the Cherokees met in council and elected J. Bartely Milam

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[51]Strickland and Strickland, 127.

[52]Ibid., 128.

[53]Ibid., 128-30.

as principal chief. President Roosevelt acknowledged their choice by appointing Milam as principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1941. He remained leader through two more presidential appointments. Upon his death, President Truman appointed William Wayne Keeler as principal chief. Finally, in 1971, the entire tribe, for the first time since statehood, elected its chief.[54]

The Cherokees had a particularly rough time between 1953-1971. The United States Congress adopted a policy of termination toward Native American tribes. The federal government felt that it was doing a disservice to Native Americans by not allowing them greater freedom and responsibility. It ended the Native American status as wards of the United States and transferred responsibility to the states. Terminated tribes could no longer depend on federal programs of health, education and welfare. They became subject to state taxes and criminal and civil cases came under the jurisdiction of state courts. Finally, individuals received land allotments with the surplus being sold to the government and retained as public land.[55]

An adjunct of this program was the relocation of reservation Native Americans to urban areas. Although the Cherokees did not live on reservations, they fell under the edict of mainstreaming Native Americans into urban areas

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[54]Mankiller and Wallis, 177-80.

[55] Arlene Hirschfelder and Martha Kreipe de Montano, The Native AmericanAlmanac (New York: Prentice Hall General Reference , 1993), 24-26. For a discussion of the effects of the termination policy on Native Americans see William T. Hagan, American Indians (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 179-86.

where they could work "like white people."[56] The relocation program was the brainchild of Dillion S. Myer, the former director of the Japanese War Relocation Authority who became Commissioner of Indian Affairs after World War II. The program was designed to provide a better life for Native Americans by moving them off reservations. Unfortunately, most Native Americans were ill-fit and ill-prepared for life in big cities. Relocatees knew little about such modern gadgets as stop lights, clocks, elevators or telephones. The noise and hectic pace of the large cities added to their confusion. According to Wilma Mankiller this type of program does not work. People forfeit their families, their land, their communities and are thrown into an alien culture with its own set of values and customs. There is no support system and they struggle between two worlds. In the end many return home.[57] One Southern California Native American in the late 1950s referred to relocation as an "extermination program." He felt that Eisenhower believed "the Indians would be integrated by taking all the youngsters off the reservation, the old would die off, the young would be integrated, and the land would become free for public domain, and all the people could grab it."[58]

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[56]Mankiller and Wallis, 66.

[57]Donald L. Fixico, Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960 (Alburquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 136-37; Griffin, "Relearning to Think for Ourselves," Women of Power 7 (Summer 1987): 38-39.

[58]Fixico, 142.

While relocation was not a solution to the Indian problem, it exposed many Native Americans to new experiences. Although Wilma Mankiller found her relocation experience particularly daunting when her family moved to Daly City, California in the 1950s, she took advantage of her situation. She became interested in social work and participated in the Native American rights movement of the 1960s. The knowledge that she gained from mainstreaming would prove invaluable when she became principal chief of the Cherokees. She encouraged her people to select whatever was useful from the outside world for their economic growth, while maintaining traditional Cherokee culture and values. During her terms in office, Wilma Mankiller was instrumental in achieving a balance between the two worlds, while promoting Cherokee self-determination.

CHAPTER V

MANKILLER AND A REVITALIZED NATION

The relocation program of the 1950s seemed to be an ideal solution for the United States government to the high unemployment and widespread poverty on the reservations. Unfortunately, the relocatees were often exposed to poverty and unemployment in an alien environment. The economic recession of 1956-57 resulted in cutbacks in production and the relocatees were usually the first to be laid off due to lack of experience. Many of the jobs they held were insecure and low-paying, such as those in seasonal agriculture. Loss of jobs, monotony, disinterest, loneliness were the reasons why many returned to their reservations. Although they returned to a familiar environment, conditions had not improved in their absence. Many turned to alcohol for release. The early fur traders introduced alcohol to the Native Americans and used it to trade for deerskins. Later, it would have dire effects on the Native Americans when used in treaty negotiations to persuade the Native Americans into making land cessions. The 1953 Congressional removal of the ban on off-reservation liquor sales to Native Americans compounded the situation. Alcoholism continues to be a major problem among Native Americans today.[1]

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[1]Fixico, 142; Hagan, 178; Mankiller and Wallis, 28.

The Cherokees, and the reservation tribes suffered the same economic depression. History texts focus on the success of Cherokee acculturation and their periods of prosperity, but fail to note the economic disparity that exists within Cherokee society between the mixed-bloods and full-bloods. Dating back to the 1830s, a division existed between the poor full-blood subsistence farmers and the rich commercial farmers and businessmen. This carried over into positions of leadership. Throughout most of the history of the Cherokees, their principal leaders have been wealthy, well-educated, mixed-blood, acculturated men. John Ross, who acted as chief from 1828 to 1866 was a well-educated prosperous farmer who owned slaves. His mother was only one-quarter Cherokee. Jesse Bartley Milam (1942-1949) was a mixed-blood, successful in banking and oil and William Wayne Keeler (1945-1975) was an affluent mixed-blood oil executive. Ross O. Swimmer, an attorney and banker, held the office of principal chief from 1975 to 1985. Currently, Swimmer is the chief executive officer of the Cherokee Nation Industries, a company that manufactures electronic components for such defense and aerospace companies as Boeing and Rockwell Industries.

The leadership styles of Ross, Milam, Keeler, and Swimmer reflected white standards where individual achievement is praised and rewarded, personal careers are encouraged, and accumulation of property and titles are the socially prescribed goals for the individual. Conversely, in Cherokee culture

the individual has value only in what he/she is able to return to the community. The community scorns self-centered or self-proclaimed achievements when it does not enrich the whole.[2] According to Rayna Green, leadership is "bonded" and "defined" in community and is measured by how much one gives to the community and how much one is part of the community, not by a list of achievements.[3] Wilma Mankiller, who is one-half Cherokee, brought back the traditional form of leadership when she was elected principal chief in 1985.

Wilma Mankiller born on November 18, 1945, spent her early years in Adair County, Oklahoma with her parents, five siblings, and extended family. Her father, the late Charlie Mankiller, was a full-blood Cherokee, and her mother, Irene, is of Dutch-Irish descent. The Mankiller name, often questioned by the media, dates back to the mid-1700s. It was the name given to a warrior chief, Mankiller of Great Tellico, known for his feats in wartime.[4]

Life in Adair County was far from idyllic, given the seasonal employment and limited cash. There was no indoor plumbing, so the children hauled water about a quarter of a mile to their home. Because everyone was poor, people bartered or shared what little they had, giving Mankiller a sense of community

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[2]Dorothy I. Miller, "Native American Women: Leadership Images," Integrated Education, 15, (January/February 1978), 37.

[3]Green, American Indian Women, 68.

[4]Michael Wallis, "Hail to the Chief," Phillip Morris Magazine, September/October 1989, 38.

beyond her family. There were many communities like Mankiller's where people lived in extreme poverty. Mainly full-blood Cherokees resided in these settlements and maintained a traditional lifestyle, preserving Cherokee customs and ceremonies and speaking Cherokee as their first language.[5] Mankiller's connection with these deprived rural communities became the focus of her attention when she started to work for the Cherokee Nation. Later, as principal chief, they became the basis for her revitalization of the Cherokee Nation.

During these years Mankiller learned about Cherokee history from her elders. She learned about the tenacity of the Cherokee people, their belief in the importance of balance and harmony between humans and nature, and their high regard for women. The knowledge of her cultural heritage and the importance of community proved to be invaluable against her opponents in the 1987 campaign for principal chief.

In 1950, Mankiller moved with her family to Daly City, outside San Francisco, as part of the government's relocation program. The design of the program was to provide a better life for Indians by moving them off reservations and into cities. Mankiller, however, described this experience as a tremendous culture shock. She related how she and her brother were fascinated by the box in the wall in the lobby of their building. People got inside the box, the box closed, and the people disappeared. A few minutes later the box opened and a

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[5]Mankiller and Wallis, 33-35.

different group of people came out. Mankiller and her brother had never seen an elevator before.[6]

The Mankiller family managed to adapt to California and eventually Wilma married an Ecuadorian, Hugo Olaya, had two daughters, and became a housewife. However, Mankiller knew that something was missing and decided, in the late 1960s, to enroll at Skyline Junior College, south of the city of San Bruno. Mankiller went on to San Francisco State University to begin a bachelor of science degree in social work.

During the turbulent sixties Mankiller divided her time between San Francisco State University and the American Indian Center, surrounded by people interested in political activism. The Center was one of the sponsors for the occupation of Alcatraz. On November 9, 1969, fourteen Native Americans landed on Alcatraz Island and claimed the island "in the name of Indians of all Tribes."[7] They based their claim on the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1808. Under the terms of the treaty any male Native American older than eighteen whose tribe was party to the treaty could file for a homestead on abandoned or unused federal property. The siege lasted only nineteen hours but the native people refused to accept defeat. They returned to Alcatraz with eighty-nine native people on November 10, 1969, and stayed for nineteen months. Although they

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[6]Ibid., 72.

[7]Ibid., 190.

were unable to create a sovereign Indian nation on Alcatraz, they aroused the public's awareness of the injustices done to Native Americans. It was during the occupation of Alcatraz by Native Americans that Mankiller, a frequent visitor to the Island, experienced her epiphany.

> From these unforgettable events that flashed like bright comets years ago, I have tried to retain valuable chunks of experience along with some of youth's raw courage. It is my hope that those idealistic moments have blended with the perspective that luckily comes with maturity. It makes for a vintage mixture that has helped to sustain me against all odds, against real and imagery foes, and even against death itself.[8]

Mankiller could no longer remain only a housewife. Her political consciousness had been raised and she knew that it was time to "let the rest of the world know that Indians had rights too."[9] She worked as a volunteer with the Pit River Tribe in California for five years, learning about treaty rights and international law. She was also active in Native American preschool and adult education programs and directed a dropout prevention program for Native American teenagers. Knowledged gained during this period would prove invaluable later in Mankiller's career. These activities, however, interfered with her husband's demands for a traditional homemaker and the couple divorced in 1974. Three years later she returned to Oklahoma with her two daughters, Gina and Felicia.

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[8]Ibid., 292.

[9]Wallis, 39.

After returning to Oklahoma, Mankiller went to work for the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma first as an economic stimulus coordinator,[10] and later (1979) as program development specialist. In the latter postion her ability to write effective grant proposals provided funding for tribal projects. She also found time to begin graduate work in community planning at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. In 1981, she established and headed the Cherokee Nation Community Development Department and embarked upon a project that received international attention, the Bell Community Revitalization Project.

When this project began, Bell, Oklahoma, was a community of 125 families of which 95 percent were Cherokee, most of whom spoke Cherokee. The mean income was less than $3,000 per year per family, and 60 percent of the population was unemployed. It was a community where water was becoming more and more difficult to obtain. Wells were often dry in summer and residents relied on the school wells. They carried water home in plastic bags. The impending closing of schools due to a decrease in population forced the community to apply for help from Chief Ross Swimmer.

Wilma Mankiller, head of the Development Department, decided that it was time to have the people do things for themselves. For too long the Cherokees were forced to rely on outside help to solve their problems. The

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[10]In this position Mankiller was required to enroll as many people as possible at the university level in environmental science and health, and then help to merge them back into their communities.

people needed to begin to trust their own thinking to determine how problems should be solved. Although funds came from federal and private sources, Mankiller expected the people to be directly involved. She insisted that meetings be conducted in the Cherokee language so that the people could be part of the planning process. The plan called for the construction of a sixteen-mile pipeline to the Cherokee Tree Water District main. Work crews included women, men, children, and the elderly. Responsibility for the construction of a two-mile segment belonged to each crew. Besides the pipeline, the townspeople remodeled or replaced fifty-two houses and built two water towers.[11]

Wilma Mankiller was a risk-taker. Many believed that the project would fail, but Mankiller's deep-rooted belief in the potential of the people proved them wrong. After the initial project was completed, the residents of Bell, Oklahoma, started a senior citizen nutrition program and a volunteer fire department.

Mankiller was also a visionary. She believed that the revitalization of the Cherokees needed to begin at the beginning--with the people, with the community. To successfully help communities and bring about the revitalization of the Cherokee Nation she proposed "a partnership, rather than something we do for or to someone."[12] Mankiller empowered the people by providing the resources but encouraging the people to do the actual work. Their small

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[11]Griffin, 39-40.

[12]Ibid., 40.

successes raised their self-esteem and encouraged other communities to believe in their own abilities, to trust their own thinking. Mankiller's revitalization of the Cherokees began with the people, not with governmental structures and issues.[13]

Mankiller's progressive grass roots approach to economic development was the subject of much debate during her 1987 campaign for principal chief. Many Cherokees wanted to continue in the same vein as the past with a candidate who held conservative ideas. Both W.W. Wheeler and Ross Swimmer, former chiefs, were conservative Republicans. However, it was the success of Mankiller's progressive approach to the Bell project that brought her to the attention of Ross Swimmer.[14]

In 1983, Ross Swimmer was up for re-election as principal chief of the Cherokees. Swimmer, a conservative, had served as chief since 1975. After being diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, his political supporters deserted him. Because his health was problematic, his ability to remain in office was challenged. Swimmer refused to give in to his detractors and asked Wilma Mankiller, a Democratic liberal, to be on his ticket as deputy chief.[15]

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[13]Ibid., 40, 72.

[14]Michael Wallace, "Wilma Mankiller," Ms, January 1989, 68.

[15]Mankiller and Wallis, 239.

Mankiller's initial answer was no. However, after realizing that she would be in a position to act on behalf of impoverished Cherokees living in rural areas, she felt obligated to accept. Believing that her philosophy of grass roots democracy and her activist background would be questioned by her constituency, she was unprepared when the main issue became her gender.

Despite the fact that gender was irrelevant, neither a benefit nor liability for holding office, many Cherokees opposed Mankiller because she was a woman. There was overt and covert antagonism toward a woman running for political office. Mankiller received harassing phone calls and hate mail that included death threats. Although she was never physically attacked, at one time all four tires on her car were slashed. There was even strong opposition within the Swimmer/Mankiller team. Some actually openly supported one of her opponents.[16]

For Mankiller the reason for this opposition based on gender was obvious. To acculturate the Cherokees into the white culture in the nineteenth century, it was necessary to undermine the role of women in Cherokee society. The Cherokee matriarchal system stood in opposition to white patriarchal culture. This bias against women was something the white man brought to Cherokee culture. What Mankiller had to defend against was sexism. Furthermore, many Cherokees thought that, if elected, Mankiller would only be

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[16]Ibid., 241.

concerned about women's issues. Opponents were also suspicious of a woman's ability to govern a tribe. Fortunately, the older traditional Cherokees knew that women once had a strong voice in government and that allowing a woman to hold public office did not violate Cherokee custom, only white southern custom. Those Cherokees familiar with their history were to be the mainstay of Mankiller's support.[17]

Mankiller's response to this dilemma was simply to refuse to enter into any debate about her sex. She stated in countless interviews that if you argue with a fool, someone passing by will not be able to tell which one is the fool. Mankiller was definitely not a fool.

In a July, 1983, runoff with Agnes Cowan, the first woman to serve on the tribal council, Mankiller was elected the first woman deputy chief of the Cherokees. One supporter said, "At long last a daughter of the people had been chosen for high tribal office."[18]

Mankiller's early days as deputy chief were fraught with difficulties. Her staff, inherited from Ross Swimmer, was conservative and opposed to Mankiller's more democratic liberal perspective. The newly elected fifteen member council, of which she was president, was uncooperative and some were

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[17]Frank L. Lockwood, "First Woman to Head Major American Indian Tribe Speaks at Harvard," Second Century, April 1987, 4.

[18]Mankiller and Wallis, 242.

even hostile to Mankiller. She felt that she had no personal power, "I had all the responsibility with none of the authority."[19]

Fortunately, she and Swimmer were in total agreement about the need to rebuild and revitalize rural communities. Swimmer supported her ideas about community development where people were encouraged to take an active part in finding solutions for their economic development. Eventually, Mankiller was able to persuade the council to work more cooperatively in running the daily operations of the tribe. As deputy chief, Mankiller was in charge of more than forty tribally operated programs ranging from heath clinics to day care, elder assistance to water projects, Head Start classes to housing construction.[20]

Mankiller was beginning to settle into a comfortable routine, when, in September, 1985, Ross Swimmer was called to Washington by President Reagan to oversee Indian affairs as Assistant Secretary of the Interior. According to Article Six of the Cherokee Nation Constitution, ratified in 1975, the deputy chief automatically replaced the resigning chief. Thus, Mankiller had to serve the remainder of Ross Swimmer's term, 1985-1987, without any mandate from the people.

Mankiller accepted this new challenge, and continued to lead her people toward greater autonomy and self-reliance. By the end of 1986, the Cherokee

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[19]Ibid, 243.

[20]Ibid.

tribe ran a high school for about two hundred poor children, a motel, restaurant and gift shop complex, a nursery, garden and landscaping business, a museum, theater and cultural center, all in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. In nearby Stillwell, Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation operated an electronic assembly plant employing 350 people, mostly Cherokee. In all of its combined businesses, the tribe employed more than 655 people. It had assets of $44 million and an annual payroll of $9.5 million. Besides supervising tribal affairs, Mankiller was a board member or officer in fifteen organizations, most dealing with American Indians.[21]

During this period, Mankiller served her people with unwavering devotion even though she spent each day in relentless pain. She suffers from myasthenia gravis, a disease characterized by extreme muscle fatigue and weakness. Her condition was in remission because of the strong medicine she was taking.

Despite physical discomfort and the many detractors to her self-help programs, Mankiller was determined to continue to rebuild her tribe, community by community. By helping local people to realize their self-worth, she believed that potential leaders were created. Once the people saw the physical changes they had wrought, they began to trust themselves and to look toward making

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[21]Lynn Simross, "Hail to the Chief: The First Woman to Serve as Head of the Cherokee Nation," Los Angeles Times, 18 September 1986, part V, p. 26.

other changes. They saw the possibility of getting involved in other policy-making positions, such as school boards. Many of these people were women.[22]

Mankiller asserts that because of the communal structure of the Cherokees, women are uniquely qualified to lead. She believes that women have a more collaborative approach. Women are consultative. They listen to a lot of people before making a decision. Women have a more holistic viewpoint whereas men lean toward making unilateral decisions and forge ahead. Women bring distinct attributes to leadership. They are adept at doing what is necessary to get the job done without letting their egos get in the way.[23]

Mankiller is a model for female leadership. As a deputy chief and appointed principal chief, she was confident in her ability to lead the Cherokees. Women could now feel more comfortable about assuming leadership roles; the word "chief" was no longer a masculine term for the Cherokees. Young girls could dream of becoming chief.

The depth of Mankiller's devotion and belief in the revitalization of the Cherokee Nation became evident when she chose to run for principal chief in 1987. Once again her sex would become a primary issue for her opponents. Some people have said that "if a man had done one-fourth of what Wilma's

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[22]Griffin, 72.

[23]Ibid., 73, 74; M.K. Gregory, "Wilma Mankiller: Harnessing Traditional Cherokee Wisdom," Ms, August 1986, 22.

done, there is no question he would be elected, but because she's female, she will be forever answering questions about female leadership."[24]

Mankiller's opponents in the race for principal chief were Dave Whitekiller, a full-blooded Cherokee postal assistant from the small community of Cookson, Oklahoma ,and a former councilman; William McKee, deputy administrator at W.W. Hastings Indian Hospital, in Tahlequah; and Perry Wheeler, a former deputy chief and funeral home director from Sallisaw, in Sequoyah County.

The attacks on Mankiller began immediately. One of the challengers, David Whitekiller, was quoted in the Muskogee Phoenix as saying, "Before [under Chief Ross Swimmer], they were saying we were led by a white--and now they say we are led by a woman. . . . All tribes have given us flack."[25] Many Cherokee Baptists , according to Lynn Howard, "think God doesn't want a woman in charge of anything."[26] Another candidate, Perry Wheeler, declared that, "women's liberation just hasn't caught up with the Cherokees. . . . They just don't think it's a woman's job, and a lot of them resent it."[27]

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[24]Ibid., 26.

[25]Judith Waldrop, "Mankiller's Challenge," American Demographics, June 1987, 56.

[26]Susan Zankin, "Woman Chief Blazing an Indian Trail," Mother Jones, September 1986, 8.

[27]John Hughes, "Indian Chief," Chicago Tribune,14 May 1986, p. 2.

Mankiller's challengers openly criticized her in the media. They attacked her on the grounds that she was a woman, she held liberal ideas that made her a poor leader, and she was a liar. In order to maintain her credibility with the Cherokees, Mankiller had to answer these accusations. However, the manner in which she answered would be a precarious undertaking. She had to chose her rhetoric very carefully. If she responded agressively, she would be viewed as bitchy and unfeminine. Resorting to mud-slinging would reduce her to the level of her detractors and create a negative image.

Mankiller could not deny her sex and identify herself with the former male conservative chiefs. She was proud to be a woman and refused to deny her feminine side. The strategy she chose was to educate the Cherokees about their history. She reminded the Cherokees of their matrilineal roots by telling a journalist,

> Before Europeans arrived in this country, the Cherokee tribe was a member of the Iroquois Confederacy. . . . Women chose the chiefs and the chiefs served at the pleasure of the women, . . . and rather than have great debates in the council meetings, women were consulted beforehand on what the issues were going to be. [It was after the forced move to Indian Territory]. . .That's when we began to have women in a more subservient role.[28]

By referring to the traditional Cherokee culture that colonization had terminated, she awakened Cherokee concern over the loss of tradition and

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[28]M.K. Gregory, "Wilma Mankiller: Harnessing Traditiional Cherokee Wisdom," Ms, August 1986, 22.

provided a reason for accepting a woman as principal chief. She pointed out that she was following in the footsteps of her female ancestors and was very much in touch with her Cherokee heritage.[29]

On the second point, concerning her liberal background, Mankiller could not deny her past involvement with the occupation of Alcatraz nor her position working in rural development. In an interview in U.S. News and World Report she stated,

> We [she and her aides] simply act as a resource; our people define and resolve many of their own problems at the community level. . . . That puts them in a position of assuming responsibilty for change, and it builds pride. . . . There's something almost patronizing about an organization. . . that figures out what a community needs, goes to Washington to get funds and then comes back and applies these funds to a community without working with local leadership.[30]

Mankiller reminded the people that her ideas were not new, and, as acting principal chief, her leadership had been effective. She reminded them about the new health care programs, including the new Hastings Hospital and clinics like the one in Jay, Oklahoma, that treated Indians and non-Indians; about obtaining funds for a substance abuse program; about the development of a new business, the Cherokee Gardens nursery; and about the progress in education, including her promotion of teaching the Cherokee language in classrooms.

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[29]Janis King, "Justificatory Rhetoric for a Female Political Candidate: A Case Study of Wilma Mankiller," Women's Studies in Communication 13 (Fall 1990): 27.

[30]"People Expect Me to be More Warlike," U.S. New and World Report, 17 February 1986, 64.

The last major accusation, that she was a liar, concerned Mankiller's health. In the July 19th editon of the Tulsa World, Perry Wheeler accused Mankiller of lying about her health. During the campaign of 1987 she was in the hospital for about four weeks prior to the June 20th election. Mankiller did not respond immediately. Later, Lynn Howard, her spokesperson, issued a statement denying the accusation, claiming that Mankiller only had a kidney infection.[31] Unfortunately, the people already knew about Mankiller's prior health problems. A 1979 car accident that crushed her face and left leg, broke her right leg and ankle and several ribs, required a series of operations. She had myasthenia gravis that was in remission after chemotherapy treatments.

Wheeler used Mankiller's silence as the fuel to ignite the flame of doubt in the public's mind about Mankiller's honesty and her physical fitness to hold office. Ultimately, Wheeler was successful in diverting the voters' attention from the real issues and forced Mankiller into a runoff election against him.

Knowing that any verbal attacks on Wheeler's fitness for office would only result in a negative image for her, Mankiller again relied on Cherokee tradition. She explained to the people that having a positive mind meant thinking well of others and of facing adversity in a positive manner. These were old Cherokee beliefs. If Wheeler were truly campaigning on Cherokee tradition, then he was

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[31]John Fink, "Mankiller Plays Up Tribe's Financial Status, New Services," Tulsa World, 13 June 1987, 5A.

violating that tradition by not thinking well of her nor of handling adversity in a positive way.[32]

Mankiller successfully answered each of the accusations by emphasizing Cherokee history, culture, and tradition. She reminded her constituents that Cherokee women once had political power and she was restoring women to their righful place. She explained that the tribe had always followed a progressive path and she was prepared to continue that tradition by encouraging the Cherokees to help themselves economically and socially, decreasing their dependence on federal largesse. Lastly, she educated the Cherokees about the custom of having a good mind toward all people. Mankiller was a leader who could serve her people forcefully. She was not a weak woman who would scurry away from confrontation. She proved she could defend herself without resorting to negative campaign tactics. When the ballots from the thirty-four districts were counted, Mankiller won easily. She outpolled Wheeler and became the first woman elected principal chief of a major Native American tribe.

In August 1987, Wilma Mankiller took her oath of office. She pledged,

> I, Wilma Mankiller, do solemnly swear, or affirm, that I will faithfully execute the duties of Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. And will, to the best of my abilities, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitutions of the Cherokee Nation and the United States of America. I swear, or affirm, further that I will do everything within my power to promote the culture, heritage, and tradition of the Cherokee Nation.[33]

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[32]King, 33.

[33]Mankiller and Wallis, 245.

This is a very simple pledge, and one that Mankiller kept over the next four years. That she was successful in carrying out her duties was evident when the Cherokees re-elected her in 1991 with 82.7 percent of the vote. At last the issue of gender and skepticism over her ability to lead had been extinguished.

Mankiller's list of accomplishments and awards during her decade as Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation (1985-1995) is impressive. Membership in the tribe tripled, the budget doubled, and three new health-care centers opened. In 1990, Mankiller signed the historic self-government agreement authorizing the Cherokee Nation to contract directly for services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and to receive direct funding to deliver services to tribal members. Since Oklahoma statehood in 1907, the power of governance by the Cherokee Nation had been diminished. Any advances toward self-government were further dampened from 1948 to the early 1970s with the enactment of the federal government's Indian termination policy. After the Indian Self-Determination Act was passed in 1975, the Cherokees started to rebuild their government. They established a new Constitution that defined the distribution and separation of powers among three branches of government, Executive, National Tribal Council, and Judicial. It recognized the rights of all Cherokees to belong to clans or organizations within the Cherokee Nation.[34]

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[34]"History Documents Tribe's Sovereign Status," Cherokee Advocate, July/August 1990, p. 20.

The preamble to the constitution states:

> We, the people of the Cherokee Nation, in order to preserve and enrich our tribal culture, achieve and maintain a desirable measure of prosperity, insure tranquillity and to secure to ourselves and our posterity the blessings of freedom, acknowledging, with humility and gratitude, the goodness of the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe in permitting us so to do, and imploring his aid and guidance in its accomplishment do ordain and establish this Constitution for the government of the Cherokee Nation.[35]

Speaking at the Symposium of Tribal Sovereignty on June 7, 1990, Mankiller stated, "We have paid for our rights with thousands of acres and hundreds of lives. We will not give up another inch." By 1994, the tribe owned 61,336 acres as opposed to 41,451 acres in 1984. Under Mankiller's leadership the Arkansas Riverbed Authority was re-activated, and the Cherokee Nation took the lead in managment of the riverbed property. Currently, the Cherokee Nation is seeking legislation to reimburse the tribe for damages incurred from the unfair seizure of tribal property.[36]

During Mankiller's administration a tax commission was established, and the judicial system and tribal marshall service was re-established. Bingo Outposts were opened providing a major moneymaking enterprise for the tribe. In addition, the Cherokee Nation became the first American Indian tribe to issue revenue bonds as a means of raising funds.[37]

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[35]Ibid.

[36]"Chief Mankiller Initiates Efforts for Decentralizing Services," Cherokee Advocate, May 1994, p. 8.

Mankiller also increased services for youth and children. The Cherokees built a new youth shelter. They established the Children's Village. The tribe developed its own foster home network, and adoptions were now controlled by the Cherokee Nation ensuring the placement of Cherokee children in Cherokee or other Native American homes. In 1988, the tribe founded the STEPP (Serving Teenagers through Education on Pregnancy Prevention) program, serving both males and females. An AIDS Advisory Committee, established in 1994, educated people about AIDS and provided treatment for the disease.[38]

In the area of education, Mankiller was emphatic about instituting Cherokee language classes in the schools. By the 1992-93 school year, classes in the Cherokee language were offered at community schools located in such areas as Fort Gibson, Stilwell, and Kansas. Mankiller was also instrumental in saving the Talking Leaves Job Corps that provides education and job training to over 250 students each year.[39]

Self-help programs continued to be high priority during Mankiller's administration. Elements of self-help were part of all tribal housing programs, the Serve America youth leadership program, the elderly programs, waterline

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[37]"Mankiller Leads Cherokee Nation Toward 21st Century," Cherokee Advocate, May 1994, p. 9

[38]Ibid., 7, 9. The Children's' Village brings the tribe's Child Development Center, STEPP, Head Start, and Even Start adult literacy program together in a central location.

[39]Ibid.

installation programs, community revitalization programs, and the Employment Assistance Readiness network micro-enterprise program.[40]

Over the years Mankiller's belief in the resiliency and tenacity of the Cherokee people never wavered. Despite a kidney transplant in 1990 because of polycystic kidney disease, Mankiller continued to work long hours on behalf of her people. Her work did not go un-noticed nor un-rewarded. She received honory degrees from Yale, Harvard,and Dartmouth. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame (1986), and the International Women's Forum Hall of Fame (1992). Ms magazine named her Woman of the Year in 1987.

Regrettably, Mankiller chose not to run for re-election in 1995. Her leadership has been an inspiration for all women. Her advice for the next generation of Cherokees is to

> Focus on your goals and don't get distracted by personal issues or peripheral goings on; once a decision is made remain steady because you will earn respect if you stand up for what you believe in; when you set a goal, keep moving forward toward that goal and even if you meet barriers, never, ever give up; and never argue with a fool because someone walking by won't be able to tell which one is the fool.[41]

Her advice to all women is to "get involved and understand national and international issues no matter where we live or what our politics are."[42]

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[40]Ibid., 9

[41]"Chief Mankille Reflects on 12 Years with Tribe," Cherokee Advocate, August 1995, p.9.

[42]John Francher, "Mankiller Opens Women's Studies Seminar," The Oklahoma Daily, 23 June 1995, p.1.

CONCLUSION

Wilma Mankiller was a spokesperson for Native Americans, for women and for the poor. When asked by journalist Michael Wallis what she wished to be remembered for, Mankiller replied, "If I am remembered, I want it to be not just because I am a woman but also because of what I have accomplished, and for the help I've given people. That's what really counts."[1]

While Mankiller's successful leadership of the second largest Native American nation has not laid to rest the decades of demeaning, degrading, and derogatory images associated with Native American women, she has provided the public with an alternative image. Movies like Dances With Wolves that portray the Native American woman as silent and docile, and Pocahontas, that reduces an historical figure to an animated character, continue to perpetuate outdated images. Wilma Mankiller is not silent, docile, nor one dimensional. She is outspoken, direct and multifaceted. She can never be relegated to the worn-out stereotypical images of princess and squaw.

During most of Mankiller's interviews with the media she educated the general public about Cherokee history. She emphasized the prominent role that women played in Cherokee society before white contact. Prior to contact

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[1]Wallis, 39.

Cherokee women dominated domestic matters, were essential for a balanced economy, and actively participated in debates concerning the political welfare of their society. Cherokee women could hardly be called the weaker sex, a name their Euro-American sisters had imposed on them.

Cherokee women enjoyed a free and easy attitude toward sexual matters. They chose their marriage partners and received custody of the children in divorce settlements. Cherokee law protected their property rights. The Cherokees depended equally on farming, the work of women, and hunting, the work of men. This sexual division of labor was equitable and extended into the political arena. Decisions about warfare rested on the matrilineal clans in matters of blood vengeance, and women often accompanied men on the war path.

Historically, Cherokee women were integrated members of their society. The value placed on their social, economic, and political contributions created a balanced and harmonious society. Colonization wrought havoc on the Cherokees by changing gender roles. Wilma Mankiller re-established the Cherokee woman's place in her society by providing the lost balance and harmony that is so desperately needed for the survival of the Cherokee culture.

Mankiller's legacy, however, is more than the sum total of her accomplishments. She leaves a new form of leadership based on self-managed team approval and effort. The people in the community define the problem and

are responsible for executing the solution. Mankiller, unlike her predecessors, was not involved in big business nor did she come from a position of wealth. She was born on Cherokee land and worked for Cherokee needs within the Nation. Mankiller focused on service to the people and concern for their welfare rather than on any profit motive. She used her political power to advance issues rather than to further private business interests. She was concerned with the human element. It is this concern that American women can bring to the political table.

Gender is a significant component of an individual's identity and life experiences. Therefore, the commingling of women and men debating public issues brings a diversity of experience based on gender that offers a wider range of possible solutions. Considering the American public's current dissatisfaction with its political leaders, the nation would do well to encourage women to enter the political arena as a new source of leadership. Mankiller has provided the model, now it is up to American women to take up the challenge and forge a place for themselves in politics. Our foremothers worked hard to obtain the right to vote, are we less inclined to work hard to increase the number of women in public office and in so doing inject government institutions with values that stress the human aspect of society?

Wilma Mankiller's success legitimized the leadership capabilities of all women. As we approach the twenty-first century, women are well positioned

with the credibility and skills to be effective leaders. They can run positive campaigns that concentrate on the issues rather than on their gender. The future looks very promising for women if they build upon Mankiller's model for success.

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